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GMR

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→ The grounds of Gordon Freeman
- 002** **002 THE LIST**
→ Because there are more than 25 good 00A games
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→ It's 10 p.m. Do you know what your children are playing?



GMR

Contributors

Every Desk

Production

2D Game City

George B. Smith

— *Journal of the American Medical Association*

ing Manager, I

Discussion

State Manager,
2004-2006

References

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1. Why the should
not be used

At this, Tom lets out a piercing scream and launches himself at my head. Yep, there's definitely something in the air on *GMFR* this month. Well, Tom, for starters. That's what happens when you bust out all the fighting games. Between the excellent *Soul Calibur II* the near perfection of Sega's re-mixed *Virtua Fighter 4 Evolution*, and the recent excavation of James' favorite fighting game of all time [see our fighting games feature—page 59], there's a lot of violence around. Couple that with David's controller-hurling tantrums courtesy of Miss Croft's latest picture and it's no wonder we're all at each other's throats. Oh—and just me, or do David and Andrew look Photoshopped in this picture? **Simon Cox** *Editor-in-Chief* **THE LAST BOSS**



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POST

YOU HAVE QUESTIONS. WE HAVE SNAPPY COMEBACKS THAT DON'T PROVIDE ANY REAL ANSWERS. OH, CANADA!

YODA. YO YO YO YO YO-DA

I just saw a video of *Knights of the Old Republic*, and what I saw was surprising, although whether in a good or bad way

is entirely based on the answer you give me. In the video, there is a character who is obviously Yoda. Now, my question is how is that possible, considering the game takes place almost 3,000 years prior to Episode IV, and Yoda made it plainly clear that he was 900 years old in Episode VI "...when 900 years old you reach look as good you will not." (Sorry, I had to quote it.) Now, is the character I saw another member of Yoda's race, something that to my knowledge hasn't ever been touched on, or is the development team using creative license, something I can't see LucasArts allowing them to do? I would really like to know.

Terence Grant

Nope, it's not Yoda, but he is a member of the same unnamed race. Yodites? Yodalescents? Yodlers?

UH-NOP

Hey, I have downloaded Kazza p2p file sharing for the purpose of music. I

recently came across a load of computer games, like, the full versions. I was wondering if this is legal to download since I don't have the games, or if you guys (and girls) think it's right.

David

You want to know if downloading full versions of computer games that you admittedly do not own is legal? What's happened to our education system?

STFU!

I've only recently come to your magazine, and overall, I heartily approve. Including all consoles and PCs in one magazine is quite handy and prevents me from having to listen to the now-incessant console-related whining going on at a certain PC magazine. My only complaint with your publication is the common use of initials for the names of many game titles in your review section. Much of the time, the full name of the title is given in the body of the review, so no problem there. But I had to read the review for "SOFF" twice before I figured out what game you were talking about (it was the reference to *Fortune* magazine that finally clued me in). I realize that game titles are becoming painfully long and unwieldy, but please keep in mind that not all of us attend E3 or religiously follow gaming news and may require that a certain amount of the house fall on our heads. Thank you.

Greg David-Craft

Space constraints for our headlines often prevent us from spelling out entire names, but we try to reference it in the full text whenever possible. Here's a handy guide for some current acronyms that may cause bafflement.

B&E - *Beyond Good & Evil*
LOI - *Lament of Innocence* (Castlevania)
THUG - *Tony Hawk's Underground*
DBG: LOGH - *Dragon Ball Z: Legacy of Goku II*
POP - *Prince of Persia*



FILM STRIPPED

I just came back from the theater, having watched *Terminator 3* (which by the way was a decent movie). That got me to thinking about the video game that is going to become out for it and the potential it COULD be a fantastic game. But as we all know, most games based off a movie license turn out to have pretty terrible gameplay. Has anyone come up with a theory why that is? Also, what's everyone's favorite movie game of all time at GMR? Thanks for the great magazine and keep it up!!

RJ Kern

The leading theory is quite simple: money. Quick and easy money, and lots of it. Just look at how *Enter the Matrix* is doing on the sales charts. Even when given enough time (Shiny had more than two years to work on the game), it can still turn out to be garbage because everyone knows it's going to sell based on the name on the box and a fancy commercial. Good movie-licensed games can be made; they just usually aren't. If we had to pick a favorite, Goldeneye gets top marks, and



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honorable mention goes to the *Alien vs. Predator* series and a select number of *Star Wars* games.



PLAYING FAVOURITES

I went to EB, bought some games, and got your magazine for free. That being said, I can't understand why all the hate for *The Matrix* game. I mean, some of us low-class simpletons may enjoy the game [maybe that's why it's a top-seller]. I don't even like the *Matrix* movies but enjoyed the mindless ass-kicking I doled out in the game. In fact, it took 2 months for my local video store to actually have a copy to rent in stock. That has to account for something, right? My inside sources say Tom is still upset he was passed over for the leading role. Either that or you hate Keanu Reeves since he is Canadian.

Which leads me to my other gripe on your Gameplanner for the month of July. You commemorate Bank Employees Day in some Third World country but you don't give any love for your friendly neighbors to the north by failing to mention Canada Day? We give you hockey, the snowmobile, Michael J. Fox, Jim Carrey, and Trish Stratus and this is the thanks we get? I smell an anti-Canada agenda at your magazine. But other than the above, your magazine is great.

Terry

We think back to our 8th grade classroom and the words of wisdom posted next to the hot-lunch menu on the wall: "Just because something's popular doesn't make it right." Considering how much time and money was invested in the project, *Enter the Matrix* should have been much more than it turned out to be. Actually, we would be interested in finding out how many copies were returned after a day or two. And we love Canada, what with its natural beauty, friendly populace, excellent beer, and "iced hockey." Remind us when Canadian Thanksgiving rolls around, and we'll make amends. You celebrate it in October, right? You crazy bastards!

THE NAME GAME

I have been playing *SOCOM* for several months now and enjoy the online play more than anyone should. I also enjoy seeing the creative names that I find in different rooms. I have recently encountered two names that I really took offense at. The first is "OSAMA BIN LADEN" [that may not have been exactly as it was spelled but you get the idea]. It is the first time I have wanted to shoot someone on my own team. The second was just as rude: "DC SNIPER." You need to seek counseling. Can't you find names that reflect a friendlier side of killing? At least wait 10 to 15 years. Finally, I would like to close by saying to the Canadians...there is more to life than hockey. It is hard to communicate with your team when you are arguing about which goalie is better. [EHH!]

Chuck

One thing you have to remember about online gaming is that, just like in the real world, people are tasteless jerks who think they're being funny. The benefit? They do us a favor and identify themselves as jackasses right away. If only these people would extend the same courtesy when walking down the street. Society could use a nice punch in the face from time to time.



I AM LOOKING FOR SOME SEQUELS

If you've ever played *Shenmue*, then you know it's a great game. It's one of those games that pulls you in and captivates you, and now the tentative final game in

the series is in jeopardy of never being released. In an interview, when asked about *Shenmue III*, Yu Suzuki said that he would make the game if there was enough demand for it. Some *Shenmue* fans have created a petition to show Mr. Suzuki that there is demand for the game. The petition can be found here: <http://www.petitiononline.com/shen1986>. Please sign it or put this e-mail in your magazine. Thanks for your time.

Matt

WE DON'T PLAY GAMES EITHER

But you don't get this often. I am an avid reader of your magazine, but the kicker is that I haven't touched a video game in my LIFE! As one of my friends has said in his letter to you, I love to read *Game Gezer* and *Post*. Go figure, since snarky comments and crazy old men are always hilarious. But I read your game reviews. But why, you ask? "Why would she bother? Why would some psychopathic person not play video games, read video game reviews, and then write us about said reviews?" But I think your reviews are wonderfully written!

"Oh, That's nice." See, flattery gets 'em every time. Of course, I also assume that you will not be easily snared by said flattery, so I'll try to write a worthwhile letter.

The thing is, I just want to sincerely thank you for your magazine. I look forward to reading *Game Gezer* every month. [Which my dear friend Braxton sends to me via e-mail. It's slowly becoming an obsession. Thanks for brightening my day once a month.]

Caitlin from NC

Thanks for the kind words, Caitlin. It's nice to hear from people who actually take the time to read what we write, even if they don't really care. That's called "accessibility," and we're all about it. We also forwarded your letter to the *Geezer*, who remains in seclusion in his summer cabin somewhere in the Northwest Territories.

Game Gezer responds: "Caitlin? What the hell kind of name is that? Damn kids. Back in my day, we had real names. Like Jane. And Skip. And Alphonse. Glad you like the column, though. Now how'd ya like to make an old man happy the right way?"

Ugh, sorry about that. We'll talk to the doctor about increasing his meds.



MESSAGE BOARD JUNKIES

Ever want to chat with a GMR editor? No? Huh, OK then. There are plenty of other people to talk to on the official GMR message boards. Go to www.gamers.com and check it out. But play nice, or we'll send you to the EGM boards.



We want to do something different with this section of *Post*, so we asked the people who would appear in it the most. Hey, that rhymes! If you have an idea to contribute, visit *The Family* at <http://boards.gamers.com>, then click on the Gamers.com Boards link. But be warned, *The Family* is not to be trifled with. Here's how it came to be...

"Let's organize one...I call Godfather! Don Oracle...has a ring to it, no?"
- The Lord Oracle

No. - GMR-Mikman

"I'd be the young stupid one that means well but always gets in the way."
- MFMIle

"I'd be the Polish man-beast that offers, but British strength in battle and clumsy online relief during the off-season."
- Comdog, iq

"I'd be the lethal enforcer, who eventually realizes how wrong the life I live is and tries to get out, but can't leave the past behind and eventually gets rubbed out by one of you guys."
- Kris_P

"If I can't be in the family, then I guess I could be the crooked sheriff. Hmm...I kinds like that."
- FatherTorque

Quote of the Month:

"Fan fics of GMR would quickly turn into erotica. I'm sorry, Yan, but it's true."
- NowhereMan

FRONT



GMA NEWS NETWORK



IN THE NEWS

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| NFL STREET | 015 |
| → EA Big continues the successful <i>Street</i> franchise | |
| BLIZZARD DEPARTURES | 016 |
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| OUTRUN 2 | 018 |
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| INTERNATIONAL REPORT | 027 |
| → Initial D. Sounds tenacious | |



→ All kinds of crazy happens in *Street*, from dudes throwing passes under their legs to QBs shaking linebackers twice their size to big ol' linemen scoring TDs.



STREET BALL

EA BIG'S STREET FRANCHISE GOES DEEP

BREAKING NEWS

Remember back on the playground, picking teams for a game of two-hand touch—or, if it was nice and muddy, full-tackle smashmouth football? Imagine that instead of choosing from a motley bunch of 13-year-olds, you had your pick of the NFL's elite players. And imagine that once those players hit the field for the street or the alley (or whatever), there were no rules, no refs, and, most important, no wussy-ass kickers. Then imagine *NFL Street*, EA Big's next move for its highly successful *Street* series.

Debating at this year's Camp EA

[Electronic Arts' annual editors' day in Redwood City], *NFL Street* follows in the footsteps of *NBA Street* by giving you a sports experience that has absolutely nothing to do with good sportsmanship and everything to do with showing up the competition.

NFL Street is seven-on-seven football: players play both sides of the ball. So if you pick Jeff Garcia as your quarterback, you better hope he can tackle when he's on D. Plus, any player can play any position, so go ahead, put Warren Sapp in at running back. Just like in *NBA Street*, there's no clock, you

play until someone reaches a certain score. And, as in *NBA Street*, points are accrued by pulling off spectacular showboat moves. Reach a certain score with your moves and you unlock *Gamebreaker* mode.

We got a little hands-on time with the game and the action is as fast and ridiculous as promised. Balls stay live, forward fumbles are allowed, and the trick plays have to be seen to be believed. *NFL Blitz*, this most definitely is not, but fun it definitely is. It should be on shelves in time for the SuperBowl.1E

PLAYERS BALL

EA BIG LAUNCHES *NFL STREET* WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM THEIR FRIENDS



EA Big took the opportunity at the annual Camp EA editors' day to announce its new *NFL Street* franchise. In typical EA "Big" fashion, the company enlisted a few stars from the NFL: Marcellus Wiley of the Chargers, Jeremy Newberry of the 49ers, Ray Lewis of the Ravens, and future Hall of Famer Barry Sanders. After taking to the field for a little touch-football fun, Barry and Ray-Ray retired to the auditorium for a little one-on-one with the game. Apparently, his four years out of the game have hurt Barry—since Ray trounced him repeatedly. Practice, Barry, practice.

XB

PS2

GC

DEFROSTED

KEY PLAYERS LEAVE BLIZZARD
U.S.A.

One day before the release of *Blizzard's* highly anticipated *WarCraft III: The Frozen Throne* expansion, the entire gaming world was rocked by the news that high-profile game designer and company frontman Bill Roper had resigned as Vice President of *Blizzard North's* San Francisco Bay Area studios.

Blizzard North cofounders and 10-year game design veterans Erich Schaefer, Max Schaefer, and David Brew, the creative minds behind *Diablo*, resigned the same day. The four innovators immediately declared their intentions to form a new game design studio and are actively seeking a publisher.

In a phone conversation shortly after, Roper confirmed rumors that the exodus was primarily fueled by the refusal of Vivendi Universal management—long interested in selling its gaming unit—to allow the foursome any input.

"We attempted to open up some better lines of communication with Vivendi Universal to gain better insight into what was happening, like their decisions around the sale of our group and the future direction of our company," Roper explained. "We felt very strongly about this. Unfortunately, we found out that this opportunity was not going to be afforded to us, which left our direction very clear."

Roper acknowledged that the new studio is already thinking strategically about game designs and is fielding phone calls from publishers. Blizzard

President Mike Morheim responded to the departure by saying, "I speak for everyone in our company when I say how grateful we are to have had the opportunity to work closely with this group of individuals...We wish them nothing but the best and are confident that they will be successful in their future endeavors." ■@_George Jones



ITSY BITSY...

GET YOUR BIKINI ON. OR OFF

JAPAN

Tired of that one-piece your girlfriend wears, or just want to slip into something more comfortable? Tecmo is offering yet another in a long series of perversion with its sexy line of swimwear based on the outfits in its hit *Dead or Alive: Xtreme Beach Volleyball*. That's right—now, you too can dress up like Tina, Kasumi (sorry, the Venus isn't available), and Ayane.

Why on Earth has Tecmo decided to branch out into high-fashion beachwear? John Inada, director of sales and marketing for Tecmo, says, "Videogames are a huge part of everyone's lifestyle. With such a

successful crossover between games, movies, and music, we realized that fashion apparel also needed to be part of this mix. It's just another way of connecting with our trend-setting audience." Supplies of the Team Ninja-designed bikinis are limited, so if you're feeling pretty, you'd better check 'em out soon. ■@



More info at www.tecmoinc.com

GAMEPORT VITAL GAME INFO, NOW BOARDING.

✈ Arrivals COMING SOON

SYSTEM	ETA	TITLE	HOW HOT?
GC	AUG	F-ZERO GX As we were writing this, our review copy arrived... Jealous?	★★★★
ALL	AUG	XIII Ubisoft's hoping XIII has enough "TWACK!" and "GOMP!"	★★★★
PS2	AUG	RPG MAKER 2 We might have to hold a contest...	★★★★
PC	AUG	HOMEWORLD 2 Seriously, how good a game is the PC having?	★★★★
PC	SEP	HALF-LIFE 2 Except for "gentilization," there are no words to describe our anticipation.	★★★★
GC	SEP	ROGUE SQUADRON III: REBEL STRIKE Not that we'd do it, but we'd like the option to waste Evoxes.	★★★★
GBA	SEP	FINAL FANTASY TACTICS ADVANCE Now we have to be all smart 'n stuff!	★★★★
GC	SEP	BILLY HATCHER AND THE GIANT EGG Crackd! Over sold? Hard boiled? The puns are delicious.	★★★★
XB	SEP	OTOGI It's like Zone of the Enders in feudal Japan.	★★★★
XB	SEP	DINO CRISIS 3 It's like Dino Crisis... in space.	★★★★
ALL	SEP	TIGER WOODS 2004 It could be the best golf game ever.	★★★★
GBA	SEP	SUPER MARIO ADVANCE 4 It's Mario! Mario! Mario! All over again. Get an e-Reader ready.	★★★★
GC	OCT	VIEWTUFUL JOE Early reviews of the Japanese version, stunning.	★★★★
GC	OCT	KIRBY'S AIR RIDE Early reviews of the Japanese version: surprisingly good.	★★★★
ALL	OCT	TONY HAWK'S UNDER GROUND Early reviews of the Japanese version: Tony who?	★★★★
GC	OCT	PIKIN 2 Fresh from Miyamoto's garden, \$0.49/1x.	★★★★

✈ DEPARTURES OUT NOW

SYSTEM	TITLE	GMR SCORE
XB	BRUTE FORCE A good concept with weak design and execution.	6 ¹⁰
PS2	SILENT LINE: ARMORED CORE If you're not already an AC fan, then you can skip it.	7 ¹⁰
PS2	APE ESCAPE 2 It's a lot like the first game, just more of it. "It" being monkeys.	7 ¹⁰
ALL	BIG MUTHA TRUCKERS The name is sorta funny. Also, the game is not.	4 ¹⁰
PS2	NAVAL OPS: WARSHIP GUNNER Complex control keeps this one barely afloat.	6 ¹⁰
ALL	THE HULK We did give the movie a 6/10, too.	6 ¹⁰
XB	SOLDIER OF FORTUNE 2 Sketchy Xbox Live play is, unfortunately.	6 ¹⁰
PC	RISE OF NATIONS Look at you! You're the King of the World!	8 ¹⁰
PC	TOTAL WAR: VIKING INVASION Speeds. If they're not lost, then they're fighting someone.	8 ¹⁰
GC/PS2/XB	SPEED KINGS Crash into me.	7 ¹⁰
ALL	MACE GRIFFIN: BOUNTY HUNTER Henry Rollins would kick our asses if he saw that score.	6 ¹⁰
PS2	DOWNHILL DOMINATION Just break the trick system and you have a real winner.	7 ¹⁰
XB	MIDTOWN MADNESS 3 There is no known cure for the Midtown Madness.	7 ¹⁰
GBA	WARIO WARE, INC. Nintendo originally created 400 games, but kept the best.	9 ¹⁰
GBA	DONKEY KONG COUNTRY It flopped and played better on the NES.	6 ¹⁰
GBA	SONIC PINBALL PARTY There's a party in my GBA, and everyone is invited!	8 ¹⁰

This Summer the underdogs
have their day.



PANDORA PRESENTS

a GAYLORD FILMS / GERBER PICTURES PRODUCTION IN ASSOCIATION WITH 900 FILMS A CASEY LA SCALA FILM "GRIND"
MIKE VOGEL VINCE VIELUF ADAM BRODY JOEY KERN JENNIFER MORRISON CO-PRODUCED BY BETSY MACKEY LANCE SLDANE EXECUTIVE PRODUCER RALPH SALL EDITOR ERIC STRAND
PRODUCED BY PERRY ANDELIN BLAKE DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY RICHARD CRUDO, A.S.C. EXECUTIVE PRODUCER E.K. GAYLORD II PRODUCED BY MORGAN STONE WRITTEN BY RALPH SALL
DIRECTED BY CASEY LA SCALA
PRODUCED BY BILL GERBER HUNT LOWERY CASEY LA SCALA
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GRIND INTO THEATERS THIS SUMMER

PLAYSTATION
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JOHN DAVISON

LARA'S DEAD

➔ What the hell happened with Tomb Raider? Arguably one of gaming's most valuable franchises, TR is one of the most notable contributions videogames have made to pop culture. With this knowledge, you'd think it would be treated with a little more care by those responsible. Qualitatively speaking, *The Angel of Darkness* is embarrassing. It's sloppy, careless, and, worst of all, not enjoyable. As Lara the zeitgeist has become more important than Tomb Raider the game, we've been exposed to videogaming's first example of a star getting fat, rich, and careless.

How can this be rectified? If Lara is to be rescued, it's time for a regime change. It's clear Core is completely out of its depth and can't be trusted to deliver what the franchise deserves. Upstarts like *Splinter Cell* and *Kemco's* upcoming *Rogue Ops* shouldn't be in a position to hand Lara her ass. She should be our reigning queen of cool. Our poster girl. Our Madonna. Instead, she's doing a much more passable impression of a Baldwin brother. She's Anthony Michael Hall before he landed *The Dead Zone*. She's Axl Rose. Sure, people buy her stuff...but out of habit, not because they actually care anymore. ☹

John Davison is Editor-in-Chief of the Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine.

TIME EXTENDED

WITH MUCH LOVE, SEGA'S OUTRUN 2 IS REVEALED

BREAKING NEWS

➔ Dear Sega: Thank you. Just as we were about to go to print, Sega of Japan released the first ever screenshots of the long-awaited *Outrun 2*, and all of the sudden, the world became a happier place.

Details are scarce, but some juicy tidbits of information have leaked out of the crank case concerning gameplay modes. The Heart meter in the bottom-right corner of the screen relates to the game's Quest mode, in which your driving and the

coolness thereof will elicit certain responses from your female passenger. If you want to keep her regular as a status symbol, then the regularly Outrun mode takes care of that. The game launches in Japanese arcades this winter, and we expect more details to emerge (as well as news of the inevitable Xbox port) from the Tokyo Game Show, which takes place in early September. ☹

More info at www.sega.co.jp



GROUND ZERO

EA ANNOUNCES EXPANSION FOR C&C GENERALS

U.S.A.

➔ *Command & Conquer* has been one of the most successful PC game series ever, and a benchmark for the genre of real-time strategies. Now, the latest best-seller in the series, *C&C Generals*, is getting its first expansion pack with *Command & Conquer Generals: Zero Hour*.

Currently in development at EA's Los Angeles studio, *Zero Hour* won't be a standalone product; you'll need a copy of *Generals* for the game to run. But once you get the game up and running, you get to enjoy a brand-new 15-mission campaign, as well as 25 new multiplayer

maps upon which to engage the computer or your friends over a LAN or the Internet. There's also a new mode called the Generals' Challenge.

No strategy-game expansion pack is

complete without new units and buildings, and *Zero Hour* has them for each of the three sides, including GLA combat motorcycles. *Zero Hour* will be on shelves this fall. ☹



[BLIPS]

Half-Life Movie

➔ According to *Daily Variety*, Valve's *Half-Life* franchise is being shopped around Hollywood by talent agency CAA. No word yet on any stars attached to the project, but we see William H. Macy as Gordon.

Back to the Dungeon

➔ Microsoft Game Studios and Gas Powered Games have announced *Dungeon Siege: Legends of Aranna*, the first expansion pack for their 2002 hack-n-slasher. Expect swords and spells up the wazoo.

NOLF Prequel

➔ The next installment in the *No One Lives Forever* series won't feature Cate Archer in the main role. Contract J.A.C.K. puts you in the evil shoes of John Hack, an operative of H.A.R.M. Get your bad guy on in November.

INFOMANIA!

THE LATEST ON...



DOA ONLINE

As you no doubt read in our *Ninja Garden* issue (GMN #67), Tecmo's *Dead or Alive Online* was scheduled for a late October release. But we're back to inform you that this is no longer the case. In the interest of keeping its focus squarely on *Ninja Gaiden*, Tecmo and Team Ninja have decided to delay *DOA Online*'s release, which is now set to arrive sometime in 2004.

While *DOA* fans are no doubt bummed, there is a silver lining. Nothing has been set in stone, but it looks like Team Ninja will be using the time to add loads of extra features that will make *DOA Online* even more the liber *DOA* collection. The most significant of these additions should be none other than *Dead or Alive 3* playable online. It's likely that the *DOA3* characters will undergo the same face-lift as the *DOA2*: Hardcore characters, courtesy of the *DOA3* graphics engine. We think that's worth the wait. **ll**

CLICKS

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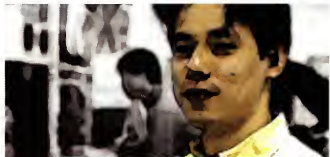


alias.gmmagazine.com

Are you an Alias fan? Or maybe you just lost after leading lady Jennifer Lynn? Visit *Game.com* for your chance to win an Alias Season 1 DVD boxed sets, copies of the Alias game (review, pg. 45), and even a visit to show's set. Just don't embarrass us when you get there. **ll**

[TALENT] ★ HIROAKI YOTORIYAMA

DESIGNER OF THE HIGHEST CALIBUR



➔ With *Soul Calibur II* in our hot little hands, we're inspired to pester its producer, Hiroaki Yotoryama, and ask a few questions. Here for your perusal are thoughts taken straight from his brain:

What user feedback from the Dreamcast *Soul Calibur* did you specifically address in making the sequel?

The majority of *Soul Blade* (PS1) fans requested a mode in which they could collect various weapons, so we produced Weapon Master mode. In that mode, players choose a character to travel around the world, collect weapons, and unlock hidden game features by completing various missions. A variety of weapon types are available and players are able to use any collected weapons in other game modes. Weapon Master is a really fun mode that adds an almost RPG-like element to the game. This type of system is possible only in a console game.

Of the three system-exclusive characters—Link, Heihachi, and Spawn—what is your favorite and why?

Each has unique strengths and weaknesses. It makes it impossible for me to pick one above the others. I see them all as fun to play for their own unique qualities.

Where do you see the series going

from here? Is there any hope Siegfried can be saved from his madness and the *Soul Edge*, or is he doomed to eternal damnation?

In *SC2*, Siegfried is still not released from *Soul Edge*'s curse. After collecting all the pieces of *Soul Edge* and brooding in his own guilt, he has decided to stay deep underground with *Soul Edge*. We would be happy if our fans are patient enough to wait for the next title in the series to find out what happens to Siegfried.

Please explain to our readers the decision to feature Heihachi as the PS2 version's secret character. We ran a poll on our website to find out what other Namco characters they'd have liked to see as the PS2-exclusive character. *Xenosaga*'s KOS-MOS was the easy favorite, but a surprising number of people picked *Dig Dug* as their second choice.

We were really curious to see how Heihachi, the strongest fighter among the bare-fisted fighters, could hold up against the weapon-wielding foes of the *SC2* world. I really hope players enjoy seeing how Heihachi holds his own—there is something innately fun in a guy who faces a giant ax with nothing more than his hands. By the way, I also would like to see *Dig Dug* in *SC2*... **ll**

NINTENDO KNOWLEDGE

THEY KNOW STUFF SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO!



PHIL THEOBALD

THE LINK STILL BURNS

➔ We've had to wait an unfair number of months since its Japanese release, but *Soul Calibur II* is finally here. What that means for *GameCube* fans is that there's finally a great *3D* fighting game to play on the little purple for black... whatever! box.

Of course, there are also two other versions of *SC2* coming out at the same time. So, what makes the *Cube* version stand out from the others? Yeah, that's right—Link.

I must admit that it is a little weird seeing our boy Link making it up with *Mitsunori* and company, but after a few rounds, he seems right at home. It's great watching Link bust out his trademark attacks (boomerang, bombs, that downward thrust from *Zelda 2*, etc.) in a fighting game. It's also a lot more satisfying seeing Link pummel his opponent here than in *Smash Bros.* (nothing against *Smash Bros.*, of course).

As cool as *SC2* is on *GameCube*, it's a shame we have to play it with the *GameCube*'s controller. That dinky little *D-pad* just wasn't made for fighting games (actually, I can't really tell what it was made for). Some company better come out with a fighting stick, stat.

Yeah, I may complain, but I ain't gonna let some minor control issues keep me from this. Now, how can I play as Lizardman? **ll**

Phil Theobald is Reviews Editor at *GameNow*.

[BLIPS] Rawkon

➔ Eidos has signed more than 20 bands to appear on the *Backyard Wrestling: Don't Try This at Home* soundtrack. Roni Size, Slayar, and Junkie XL will all help keep the beat while you drive staples into some poor sod's already shattered sternum.

Do It for Yellow

➔ Fans of yellow packaging alert! Eidos spin-off, Fresh Games has secured the rights to Irem's *3D* shooter *R-Type First*. Smaller publishers like *Age of Empires* and *Empire Interactive* were out for the rights to wrap the game in ghostly yellow packaging.



UNITED AT BIRTH...



Alcohol Reference
Mild Language
Violence

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JEFF GREEN

STAR BORES

➔ "I waited three years for this!"

Unfortunately, this has been the general reaction to the hugely hyped *Star Wars Galaxies*, which has been live for about a week. I'm not going to pass judgment on the game right now, because as anyone who plays these MMORPGs knows, it takes time to prove their worth. And I haven't seen nearly enough yet to say whether it's the disaster that some people are declaring.

I can tell you, however, that Sony Online and LucasArts did manage to get the game off on the completely wrong foot with an utterly inexcusable and embarrassing fiasco of a launch day. Most gamers weren't even able to connect at all, and those who did were faced with repeated crashes until Sony finally just gave up and took all the servers down. Two giant game companies with unlimited resources, and this is how they launch their big game? Bravo.

But let's not be bitter. That was just the first day, so we can call it a case of the pitters. The bigger concern is the sinking feeling that, as Gertrude Stein once said about Oakland, "There's no there, there." My first week as a fledgling Wookiee has seen lots of people standing around with not much to do—not exactly the *Star Wars* experience we were looking for. But we'll see. It could get better. ☺

—Jeff Green is Editor-in-Chief of Computer Gaming World magazine.

TOP 10 ALL FORMATS

RANK	TITLE	FORMAT	SCORE
01	TOMB RAIDER: ANGEL OF DARKNESS Lara makes another appearance, but the courts say Simon has to stay 500 yards away.	PS2	4
02	STAR WARS GALAXIES This isn't the <i>Star Wars</i> game you want to play. Just see our Reviews section.	PC	TBD
03	WARCRAFT III: THE FROZEN THRONE The temptation to make a joke about "snow balls" is overwhelming.	PC	9
04	ENTER THE MATRIX Go ahead, don't listen to us.	PS2	4
05	THE HULK Dude, it's called anger management. Look into it.	PS2	6
06	NEVERWINTER NIGHTS: SHADOWS OF UNRENTIDE We have no idea what "unrentide" is, but it's shadowy.	PC	9
07	BRUTE FORCE It's going to take a brute force to make us want to play this game again.	XB	6
08	MIDNIGHT CLUB II All the Xbox racers catch up with their PS2 kindred.	XB	8
09	NBA STREET VOL. 2 Did you hear about NFL Street? No? Turn back a couple of pages.	PS2	9
10	DONKEY KONG COUNTRY Have you ever heard that phrase "it's on like Donkey Kong"? Well, it is.	GBA	6

PS2 TOP 10

	SCORE
01 TOMB RAIDER: AOB	4
02 ENTER THE MATRIX	4
03 THE HULK	6
04 NBA STREET VOL. 2	9
05 MIDNIGHT CLUB II	8
06 RESIDENT EVIL: DEAD AIM	5
07 RTCW: OPERATION RESURRECTION	TBD
08 ARC THE LAD	5
09 SPLINTER CELL	8
10 DYNASTY WARRIORS 4	6

XBOX TOP 10

	SCORE
01 BRUTE FORCE	6
02 MIDNIGHT CLUB II	8
03 THE HULK	6
04 SOLDIER OF FORTUNE 2	6
05 ENTER THE MATRIX	4
06 MIDTOWN MADNESS 3	7
07 RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN: TIDES OF WAR	8
08 HALO	10
09 MACE GRIFFIN	6
10 NBA STREET VOL. 2	9

PC TOP 10

	SCORE
01 STAR WARS: GALAXIES	TBD
02 WARCRAFT III: THE FROZEN THRONE	9
03 NWN: SHADOWS OF UNRENTIDE	9
04 MORROWIND: BLOODMOON	TBD
05 THE SIMS: SUPERSTAR	6
06 RISE OF NATIONS	8
07 WARCRAFT III	8
08 GTA: VICE CITY	10
09 PLANETSIDE	5
10 WARCRAFT III COLLECTOR'S ED.	8

GBA TOP 10

	SCORE
01 DONKEY KONG	6
02 DRAGON BALL Z: LEGACY II	7
03 ADVANCE WARS 2	9
04 THE HULK	7
05 POKEMON SAPPHIRE	7
06 POKEMON RUBY	7
07 YU-GI-OH! WORLDWIDE EDITION	6
08 FINDING NEMO	TBD
09 WARIO WARE	9
10 CASTLEVANIA: ARIA OF SORROW	8

GC TOP 10

	SCORE
01 SONIC ADVENTURE: DX	7
02 LOZ: THE WIND WAKER	9
03 THE HULK	6
04 WARIO WORLD	7
05 MEGA MAN	6
06 ENTER THE MATRIX	4
07 ULTIMATE MUSCLE	9
08 FINDING NEMO	6
09 MARIO PARTY 4	8
10 NBA STREET VOL. 2	8

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THE XIII FILES

DAVID DUCHOVNY LENDS VOICE TO SHOOTER

U.S.A.

➔ Ubi Soft has announced the signing of David Duchovny as the voice of the main character in *XIII*, its new cel-shaded shooter coming out for Xbox, PS2, and PC this fall.

Duchovny joins actress/musician Eve, who stars as Major Nelson, and Adam West (TV's Batman), who lends his inimitable voice to the character of General Carrington.

In *XIII*, you play a mysterious stranger who washes up on a beach. You have a key to a safe deposit box and a tattoo that

reads "XIII"—these are the only clues to your identity. As *XIII*, you must figure out who you are and why you've become entangled in a plot to assassinate the president of the United States.

Celebrity voice acting in games is becoming so commonplace it's almost expected in new games. Blame it on *Vice City* getting such big name talent as Gary Busey and Dennis Hopper and the upcoming *True Crime: Streets of L.A.*, which features Christopher Walken and Gary Oldman. ☛



XBOX KNOWLEDGE

THEY KNOW STUFF SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO!



EVAN SHARMOON

HANG THE DJ

➔ The Xbox Music Mixer, which stands as Microsoft's sole hardware announcement at this year's E3, is a bit underwhelming at first glance. While singing karaoke, viewing PC-based digital images on my television screen, or looking at "real-time video and audio effects" are cool concepts, they don't necessarily light my soul on fire.

As I ponder the possibilities of connecting my Xbox to my computer, one stands out above all others: transferring and/or streaming MP3s from my home computer to my Xbox hard drive during gameplay. I have 20GB of MP3s on my Mac and about three CDs worth of music ripped on my Xbox—meaning that when I want to import custom soundtracks into *Burnout 2*, the ability to draw from my main library would be much better than listening to Kenny G's *Rhythm: A Holiday Album* for the thirty-thousandth time.

Of course, whether this option will even exist remains unclear. Microsoft's proprietary format for music files is not MP3, meaning that there may be compatibility issues. Mac compatibility is also announced as of yet, meaning I (and 10 percent of the personal computer-owning population) may be out of luck. It's a cool idea, and one that would help bring the Xbox credibility as a true "home entertainment" device. ☛

—Evan Sharmoon is Editor-in-Chief of Xbox Nation.

PORTABLE PC

POTENT GAMING PC THINKS ITS A CONSOLE.

U.S.A.

➔ Falcon Northwest is widely considered to be the founder of the boutique gaming system trend that's led to the creation of outfits like Alienware and Voodoo PC. While anyone can plunk down some coin for a mainstream rig by companies like Dell or HP, hardcore PC gamers have always had needs that aren't necessarily covered by companies whose primary concern is getting your grandma on the Internet. PC technology has gotten faster, cheaper, and smaller, and these changes have allowed for the creation of Falcon's truly portable gaming rig, the FragBox.

Boasting a Lucite case replete with a handle, at 14 pounds the FragBox is designed for the serious LAN gamer. While it's possible to attach a carrying strap (like those made by GearGrip) to a standard desktop PC, there's nothing fun about lugging around a 30- to 40-pound tower. At first glance, skeptics are likely to wonder how much power Falcon could possibly cram into a PC the size of a shoebox, but one look at the FragBox's list of

components shows you that this baby is no slouch. At its heart is a 2.67GHz Pentium 4 processor with 512MB of RAM, an 80GB hard drive, and a 128MB Nvidia GeForce FX 5600 Ultra graphics card. Yep, all that in that tiny box. Of course there isn't a ton of room for expansion [there's a single open PCI slot] but the FragBox wasn't designed with

expansion in mind, it was designed for gamers who wish to take their gaming rigs with them wherever they go.

We loaded up some benchmarks as well as some games to see how the FragBox would hold up under pressure and we were pleased with the results. *Quake III: Arena*, *Serious Sam: TSE*, *Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast*, and *Unreal Tournament 2003* all ran well on it at a resolution of 1280x960 with cool graphics effects like antialiasing [which removes the jaggies you often see in games] turned on.

Ultimately, if you're looking for a gaming rig that you can take with you, the FragBox is about as close to perfect as you can get. We'd suggest, however, configuring one with a slightly more powerful graphics card. ☛ —Will O'Neal

More info at www.falconnwc.com



[BLIPS]

Sidewinder Bites It

➔ Microsoft has confirmed the discontinuation of its Sidewinder line of PC-gaming peripherals. The company cited a lack of interest by PC gamers for a direct controller other than a mouse and keyboard.

GBA Tunes

➔ Data! Electronics will be releasing the Advanced Music Player for GBA. For \$39.99 you'll get a device that allows you to download music from your PC to your GBA for music on the go. Rock.

Activision Sues Viacom

➔ Activision, which has the exclusive rights to publish games under the *Star Trek* license, is suing Viacom for failing to exploit the franchise and letting it become "stagnant." Insert your own joke here.

A Deadly Tournament...



MORTAL KOMBAT TOURNAMENT EDITION



NEW! MULTI-LINK
CAPABILITIES ALLOW UP
TO FOUR PLAYERS TO
BATTLE IN TOURNAMENT
AND TAG TEAM PLAY.



Tournament Launches,
August 2003

Revenge.

THE DEADLY ALLIANCE BETWEEN SHANG TSUNG AND QUAN CHI REMAINS INTACT. CAN THEY BE DEFEATED? A NEW SET OF WARRIORS CROSS THE THRESHOLD INTO A DEADLY TOURNAMENT TO SEER REVENGE AGAINST THE EVIL WARLORDS.



Blood
Violence

GAME BOY ADVANCE

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MIDWAY

GAMEPLANNER | AUGUST 2003

SOUL CALIBUR 2, F-ZERO GX, THE TROUBLE WITH KOBÉ, AND BYE-BYE AMERICAN PIE

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SAATURDAY
					01	02

03	04	05	06	07	08	09
A couple of unconventional racing games come out today: <i>Ready, Ready, Racer!</i> (PS2, Xbox) and <i>Ready, Ready, Racer! Ride: Game Wide</i> (PS2).	A trio of PS2 releases: <i>IPSP Maker 2</i> , <i>Chaos Legions</i> , and <i>Blatant Hit II</i> . Is paracausal combat the future of fighting games? <i>Recess: Island Thunder</i> expansion disc for Xbox.	As if you needed to buy more Tron games, Star Wars: <i>Episode I</i> comes out today for PS2 and Xbox. May the force...er, live long and prosper.	As if you needed to buy more Tron games, Star Wars: <i>Episode I</i> comes out today for PS2 and Xbox. May the force...er, live long and prosper.	At long last, Freddy Krueger faces off with Jason Voorhees in a battle for the ages. <i>Jason vs. Freddy</i> is the best homicidal maniac. Our money's on Freddy. It's the hail.	Colin Farrell, Samuel L. Jackson, and LL Cool J star in <i>3:10 to Yuma</i> , opening in theaters today. The movie boasts the theme song (it's LL rapping about being a cop).	In the world of horror movies, Wes Craven is truly a king among men. We have a new Craven movie, <i> Freddy vs. Jason</i> , turns 44 today. And also because Freddy vs. Jason opens this month.

10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Professional wrestling legend and former <i>Thunder</i> star, Ric Flair, returns to the ring in <i>Flair vs. Hulk Hogan</i> . The match is scheduled for today. Which? game do you think will win? Running all over you?	<i>After Echo</i> comes out for PS2 and Xbox, while <i>Conquest of the Empire</i> comes out today for PS2 and Xbox. <i>Freddie Fingers</i> .	<i>Virtual Fighter 4: Evolution</i> for PS2, <i>Fullmetal Alchemist</i> for PS2, and <i>Fullmetal Alchemist: The PC</i> . Everyone wins, but PS2 owners win more.	As if you needed to buy more Tron games, Star Wars: <i>Episode I</i> comes out today for PS2 and Xbox. May the force...er, live long and prosper.	At long last, Freddy Krueger faces off with Jason Voorhees in a battle for the ages. <i>Jason vs. Freddy</i> is the best homicidal maniac. Our money's on Freddy. It's the hail.	For those of you too young to remember <i>Batstar</i> (which, by the way, was sort of like <i>Star Wars</i>), <i>Batstar</i> is back. <i>Batstar</i> is the best. Whatever—the Xbox game is out today.	For those of you too young to remember <i>Batstar</i> (which, by the way, was sort of like <i>Star Wars</i>), <i>Batstar</i> is back. <i>Batstar</i> is the best. Whatever—the Xbox game is out today.

17	18	19	20	21	22	23
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24	25	26	27	28	29	30
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INTERNATIONAL REPORT

DRIVE FOR LIFE

INITIAL D MAKES POWERSLIDING A WAY OF LIFE

● JAPAN

➔ Based on a massively popular manga, *Initial D Special Stage* introduces us to young Tak Fujiwara, a high-school student who has reluctantly entered the world of street racing after some convincing from a group of his friends known as the Akina Speed Stars. Tak's no ordinary boy, though: He's a driving prodigy. Thanks to some Zen-like training from his father, Tak is the fastest car around, piloting, of all things, an old Toyota AE86 Trueno. The master of the Mount Akina downhill course, Tak regularly finds himself competing against top racers from neighboring towns.

And so the PS2 home conversion of the successful sit-down arcade game developed by Sega Rosso [Sega Rally Championship] is in our grasp, and it's awesome. While it might not be graphically quite as crisp as the Naomi 2-powered arcade unit, it's darn close.

A couple dozen cars taken from the original manga are at your disposal, including some popular with the *Fast* and the *Furious* crowd, such as the Celica GT-Four, the Skyline GT-R V-spec, the Civic Type-R, and, of course, Tak's trusty Toyota Trueno. While the normal Arcade mode has you powersliding around a handful of treacherous uphill and downhill courses, the Story mode pits you against Tak's rivals and places you in events straight out of the books. Your first event has you practicing the courses while trying to keep water from spilling out of your cup, while later ones have you battling rivals like Ry Takahashi of the Red Suns and Takeshi Nakazato of the Night Kids.

The downsides: *Initial D* lacks multiplayer action, and the car models look kind of bland even when compared to older racers like *Gran Turismo 3* or *Ridge Racer V*. The game does convey a thrilling sense of speed, though, and the control (with a Dual Shock controller or Logitech wheel) is excellent.

GMR has learned that *Initial D*'s U.S. license holder, TOKYOPOP, is planning to release the animated series on DVD beginning this September to accompany its manga line (up to volume 7). Even better, TOKYOPOP is currently negotiating with several interested game publishers to bring the game Stateside. Let's just hope it adds iLink support. 14



← *Initial D* is a sweet blast of the old-school arcade-style racing Sega's best known for. Developed by Sega Rosso (formerly AM3)—which has also created *Sega Touring Car Championship* and the *Sega Rally* series—*Initial D* gives *Ridge Racer* a run for its powersliding money. And it's coming to the States.



➔ If you want to brush up on *Initial D*'s backstory, you can find both the translated manga and, coming soon, the anime, in stores courtesy of TOKYOPOP.



XB
PC
PS2
GBA
GC

NEXT

INCOMING GAMES PREVIEWED

PREVIEWED THIS ISSUE:

OTODU: MYTH OF DEMONS	XB	029
QIND CRISIS 3	XB	030
JURASSIC	GC/PS2/XB	030
ALTER ECHO	PS2/XB	032
SPYGLASS AND THE SHADOW OF SET	GC	032
LETHAL SKIES II	PS2	032
BILLY HATCHER & THE GIANT EGG	GC	034
TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2004	GBA/GC/PC/PS2/XB	034
MONSTER RANCHER 4	PS2	034
SUPER MARIO ADVANCE 4: SUPER MARIO BROS. 3	GBA	034
HOMEWORLD 2	PC	036
BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER: CHAOS BLOODS	GC/PS2/XB	036
SHINING SOUL	GBA	036
1080 AVALANCHE	GC	038
DISNEY'S EXTREME SKATE ADVENTURE	GBA/GC/PS2/XB	038
NHL 2004	GC/PS2/XB	038
BATTLESTAR GALACTICA	PS2/XB	038
ALIAS	PC/PS2/XB	044
ROGUE OPS	GC/PS2/XB	044
GOthic II	PC	044
KILL SWITCH	PS2/XB	045
FREEDOM FIGHTERS	GC/PC/PS2/XB	045
SPONGEBOB SQUAREPANTS: BATTLE FOR BIKINI BOTTOM	PS2/XB	045
JAMES BOND 007: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING	GBA/GC/PS2/XB	046
MARIO & LUIGI	GBA	046
WALLACE & GROMIT IN PROJECT 200	GC/PS2/XB	046
METAL ARMS: A GLITCH IN THE SYSTEM	GC/PS2/XB	050
RATCHET & CLANK: GOING COMMANDO	PS2	050
MEDAL OF HONOR: RISING SUN	GC/PS2/XB	050
HNKUA	GC/PS2	051
MAFIA	PS2/XB	051
CHAMPIONS OF NOBIRATH: REALMS OF EVERQUEST	PS2	051

WARNING!

HAZARDOUS MATERIAL

Here at GMR, we preview games a little differently. To ensure that our previews are as relevant as possible, we feature only titles that will be released within six months. We also record our level of excitement about the game with cool little flames. Previews are not reviews—they're merely a guide as to how good a game-in-progress is looking. It's a snapshot. If we're not very excited by it, the game gets one or two flames. If we're taking a wait-and-see attitude, expect to see three flames. Over and above that, you can bet we're pretty excited. It's our duty to tell you what we think at every stage of a game's development cycle—positive, negative, or somewhere in between.



→ This giant electrified multi-limbed 'guy' to your left is one of the most impressive bosses in *Otogi*, and a prime example of just how fantastic the art design is. If floating-sized bugs actually existed, we imagine that this is how they'd look.



RELEASE | SEPTEMBER

OTOGI: MYTH OF DEMONS

DEVELOPER: XBOX | PUBLISHER: SEGA | DEVELOPMENT: FROM SOFTWARE

WALK SOFTLY AND CARRY A BIG SWORD

➔ Here at the GMR office, we like to bandy about such cryptic phrases as "the water springs eternal," "the fire burns deep within," and "the wind breaks with a terrible ferocity." It makes us sound smart and noble and all that junk. So imagine our delight when we dove into a playable and nearly complete version of From Software's *Otogi*, a beautiful action game with a funny name that treats its subject matter with a certain degree of class—one that magazine editors could never hope to achieve.

You play as Raiko, an undead warrior chosen by the powers that be to cleanse the landscapes of ancient

Japan of a demonic plague. While there's plenty of combat on solid ground, *Otogi*'s many monsters must be defeated with aerial-based maneuvers—and this is where the game gets cool. After launching into a double-jump, you can perform an invisible dash in the air and then use an upward sword strike to gain more altitude. And if you're good enough, you can stay airborne indefinitely.

To get the job done properly, Raiko can equip an assortment of swords and support items that you can either purchase or find in the game's 25 levels. Each weapon has specific attack and defense attributes, and some have

other special characteristics that help in battle (for example, one particular weapon will increase in attack power as you take damage). Raiko uses two different physical attacks: normal and strong sword strikes. The former provides for rapid offense maneuvers, while the latter is useful for clearing out a large group of foes or for laying waste to your surroundings. Plus, there's plenty of environment to destroy: Houses, trees, stone columns, wooden floors, giant crystals...you're even rated on your bulldozing skills at the end of each level. Didn't get a good grade your first time through? No problem—to finish the job, you can go

back into any level you've cleared. This not only affords you an extra opportunity to make a mess out of things, but it's also a handy tactic for gaining more experience points and earning more money for new toys.

We've had a few problems with the camera, but those notwithstanding, we're happy with damn near everything else. Excellent presentation and artistic beauty put *Otogi* very close to the top of our list of this year's most eagerly anticipated Xbox titles. **A+**

GMA SAYS → The knockout combo of *Otogi* and *Ninja Gaiden* has us thinking we've died and gone to Ninja Heaven. Yes, there really is a Ninja Heaven.

➔ HOW HOT... 🔥 🔥 🔥 🔥 🔥

RELEASE | SEPTEMBER

DINO CRISIS 3

DESIGNED BY XBOX CAPCOM DEVELOPER CAPCOM JAPAN

WARNING! THIS DINO MIGHT BITE...

➔ For the Xbox-exclusive sequel *Dino Crisis 3*, Capcom decided to splice *Jurassic Park's* DNA with genetic material from *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Thus, 500 years after *Dino 2*, a team of space commandos must disable a crazed computer-controlled spaceship full of dinosaurs that's speeding toward Earth. For now, we'll put aside the question of how the dinosaurs wound up on the spaceship.

For starters, don't expect another PlayStation-style *Dino Crisis*. Though the series was once *Resident Evil's* compelling first cousin, it's now a horror-free version of Sega's action shooter *Gun Valkyrie*. In all three of these, a single player controls a gun-toting character from a third-person perspective, fending off attacks by non-human assailants. But the differences are significant, including *Dino's* light exploration elements and casting of dinosaurs as the sole villains.

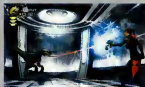
Dino 3 introduces other changes: Old heroine Regina has been replaced by some new and improved gunslingers. Each carries a slightly different set of primary weapons that can be charged or shot in bursts, and limited-use helper robots called Wasps can attack or solve puzzles. All of the characters now use jetpacks, creating the twist that changes the game's flow from *Evil* to *Valkyrie*: Jumping, hovering, and climbing add significant action to what was previously a more deliberate formula.

Add to the mix the machinations of the aforementioned spaceship's malicious HAL 9000-like computer, Mother. You walk (or hover) from shiny metallic room to shiny metallic room, disabling Mother's electronic defenses while skinless teleporting dinosaurs and mutated organisms try to snack on you and your offscreen teammates.

Unfortunately, offscreen is a key phrase in *Dino 3*. Even though the Xbox has propelled the backgrounds into above-average 3D after *Dino 2's* flat, pre-rendered diversion, our beta version is plagued with distinctly uncomfortable camera angles and impeding jumps, and it requires blind shooting at hordes of offscreen enemies. Though we're skeptical that the camera will be completely fixed by the September release date, we can always pray for zooming out or better angles, right? ☹️

GMA SAYS → A little tweaking here and there could make a real *Crisis* of this sleeper.

→ HOW HOT...



← Shoot enough dino and you'll live to see some of Capcom's most finely rendered cinematics to date. If you care. And you do care, don't you?



ROADKILL

DESIGNED BY DC/PS2/09 DEVELOPER MIDWAY DEVELOPER TERMINAL REALITY

Straddling the divide between GTA-like city and *Street Kings* The Stunt. Midway's post-apocalyptic car control game features road wars, level between, three radio station, humor, single and multiplayer modes, and more than 30 cars salvaged from the junk pile and armed to the teeth. Players can even equip packzippers with their newly soaked up hordes of junk, which we know is going to go over just great with some of you.

RELEASE | SEPTEMBER

→ HOW HOT...



DARE TO LOG ON TO BUTTERFINGER.COM

RELEASE | SEPTEMBER



RELEASE | AUGUST

ALTER ECHO

DEVELOPER: PICOBOX PUBLISHER: THQ DEVELOPER: OUTRAGE ENTERTAINMENT

GEL GONE WILD

➔ At their best, 3D platform games benefit from wacky stories, various levels with unique gameplay, and eye-catching visuals. Thanks to some shape-shifting space goop and a clever three-fold gameplay setup, *Alter Echo* seems to have these basics well covered.

Imagine a super Silly Putty capable of being made into just about anything, and you have multiplast. It's pretty powerful stuff that can only be found on a single planet in the entire universe—dubbed Proteous—and now, it's alive and determined to destroy all of humanity.

Unfortunately, goop is just that—goop. Many of the enemies and environments we've encountered here lack the personality to match the game's psychedelic look. Much cooler-looking is the hero Nevin,

whom players must guide across this thoroughly hostile planet in an effort to save us all. Nevin's supersuit has been crafted from multiplast, enabling him to quickly shift between stealth, melee, and gun forms. Finding the right form to use in the right situation is crucial to your success—and Nevin's.

Nevin's suit also allows the player to stop time and combo attack multiple baddies. A rhythm minigame requires precisely timed button presses in order to chain together combos. Succeed and Nevin unleashes his attack in a surrealistic state of suspended time. **B+**

GMA SAYS → All the pieces appear to be here. Let's hope the final release puts it all together into something solid!

➔ HOW HOT... 🔥🔥🔥



SPHINX

DEVELOPER: DOLBY DEVELOPER: THQ DEVELOPER: EUROCOM

THE EGYPTIAN MAGICIAN

➔ This fall, THQ goes old school with *Sphinx and the Shadow of Set*...and we mean really old school, as in ancient Egypt. Taking place in a hieroglyphic-heavy universe reminiscent of *StarGate*, the games' two heroes do battle with an assortment of strange totemic creatures and test their wits against perplexing puzzles to unlock passageways and magical portals.

The main character is Sphinx, an androgynous demigod who fancies a sparkling sword and blowpipe (check please!). Swordplay is entertaining, but this warrior running through temples, pulling on random levers, and pushing large stones seems like a waste of his true land far more exciting abilities.

However, taking control of the mummy Tutankhamen makes figuring out enigmatic environments an experience to be truly enjoyed. Tutankhamen conveys a wicked sense of humor (for a dead guy), as illustrated by his "I don't really wanna be here" expressions and his nonchalant manner while getting electrocuted, flattened to a pancake, and set aflame—all of which are necessary to negotiate his levels. There's something entertaining about the way the blasé Tutankhamen relates to the challenge that we find especially endearing. **B+**

GMA SAYS → Murda—now there was one sick-kick mummy!

➔ HOW HOT... 🔥🔥🔥



LETHAL SKIES II

DEVELOPER: PS2 DEVELOPER: SAMMY STUDIOS DEVELOPER: AIRMAK

The latest entry in the ever-popular genre of "over-the-toply rendered real-world airplanes flying high and occasionally lighting lumbering beasts above a war-torn Earth in the near future" is *Stemp's Lethal Skies II*, and it appears to nail all of those points nicely. Featuring 10 planes, 40 sorties, and plenty of extras, *Skies* already feels great, although hardcore simmers may find the arcing controls a real turnoff.

RELEASE | SEPTEMBER

➔ HOW HOT... 🔥🔥🔥



DIGIMON

DIGITAL MONSTERS

BATTLE SPIRIT

2

Unlock the exclusive mini-game!



LINKABLE! - Head to head action for 2 players*



Collect Spirit Balls and Digivolve to Beast Form!



NEW FEATURE! Collect Ancient Spirits to Digivolve to Ancient Form!

CAN YOU DEFEAT KERPYPMON ONCE AND FOR ALL?

* 2 Player mode requires each player to use a separate Game Pak.

EVERYONE
E
ESRB

Cartoon Violence

www.bandagames.com

GAME BOY ADVANCE

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**BAN
DAI**

RELEASE | SEPTEMBER

BILLY HATCHER & THE GIANT EGG

Developer: SEGA Publisher: SEGA Designer: SONIC TEAM

CAN'T MAKE AN OMELET...

➔ *Billy Hatcher & The Giant Egg* is easily categorized—it's an egg-rolling game—but that's not a convenient subject for comparison. Is it a good egg-rolling game? How can you tell? Has anyone ever made an egg-rolling game before?

Such are the risks of defining new territory, but Sonic Team has plenty of fresh ideas to go with the fresh poultry. Leaving Sonic behind has cleared the table for new gameplay elements and smoother presentation. Billy can move fast when he wants to, but he's not bound by Sonic's need to outrun the

camera at every turn.

Besides running like hell and rolling eggs, Billy can bounce, toss, raise, and hatch his eggs. He also uses them to crush enemies like the Egg Smash and Egg Dunk!, jump to higher areas like the Egg Bounce!, or hatch sidekick monsters with useful powers. And the game definitely makes the most of Billy's skills—seven worlds with eight missions each make for a host of puzzles and hundreds of eggs. **E+**

GMA SAYS → Looks to be the best egg-rolling game ever and a sharp 3D platformer, too

➔ **HOW HOT...** 🔥 🔥 🔥 🔥

RELEASE | SEPTEMBER

MONSTER RANCHER 4

Developer: PS2 Publisher: TECMO Designer: TECMO

COOL NEW RANCH FLAVOR

➔ With years of experience under its belt, Tecmo knows a thing or two about ranching monsters. The company's latest effort, *Monster Rancher 4*, is the result of vigorous breeding and repeated training (or is that the other way around?), and it looks like it could be the best version yet.

For starters, this monster is more adventurous. After whipping your team of critters into fighting shape in your customized training ground, you can take them off the ranch and into the great wide open for a world-roaming adventure. As you progress through the story, you'll have plenty of opportunities to try out the new battle system, which includes counters, three-on-ones, and tag-battles. As with the previous three installments, you can feed CDs and DVDs to your PS2 and witness the

miracle of monster birth. **E+**

GMA SAYS → If it comes together, *M4* may appear to more than bread-battle nuts.

➔ **HOW HOT...** 🔥 🔥 🔥 🔥

RELEASE | SEPTEMBER

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 04

Developer: SEGA/CPG/PS2/GB Publisher: EA Designer: EA SPORTS

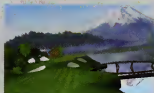
PUT A TIGER IN YOUR TANK

➔ Golf: a man's game. It must be all the references to balls, holes, strokes, etc. But the man as far as professional golf goes is Tiger Woods, and the EA Sports golf game franchise that bears his name is set to keep rolling on every platform with the latest iteration, *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004*.

What's new this year? In addition to the requisite graphical upgrades (and yes, it sure is pretty), *Tiger Woods 2004* has seven new courses and more real-life PGA players

(including John Daly and Vijay Singh), along with a robust Create-a-Player system to get your own duffing likeness into the game. The addition of new modes such as Long Drive Shootout and Battle Golf should make for more nontraditional fun, and real-time PGA Tour events will be triggered by your console's internal hardware clock. **Fore!** **E+**

GMA SAYS → Why not just go outside and really play golf? Because we suck at it.

➔ **HOW HOT...** 🔥 🔥 🔥 🔥

SUPER MARIO ADVANCE 4: SMB 3

Developer: GBA Publisher: NINTENDO Designer: NINTENDO

This friends is the one we've all been waiting for: *Super Mario Bros. 3*, quite possibly the greatest game ever created. On the GBA. But it's not exactly as you remember it. If you're lucky enough to see an emulator, you'll be able to scan its features available in *Super Mario Bros. 2* and *Super Mario World*. After this, though, Nintendo's got plans for an all-new Mario series.

RELEASE | SEPTEMBER

➔ **HOW HOT...** 🔥 🔥 🔥 🔥



THE BEATDOWN EVOLVED



SEGA



PlayStation 2



Suggestive Themes
Violence

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RELEASE | AUGUST

HOMEWORLD 2

DIRECTOR PC PUBLISHER WINDY UNIVERSAL DEVELOPER RELIC

A SORT OF HOMECOMING

➔ In space, no one can hear you harvest resources. The original *Homeworld* was hands down 1999's best RTS (yep, even better than *Age of Empires 2*), primarily due to the extremely high production values that shined through in the well-directed animations, excellent musical score, and engaging story that gave the game a certain elegance not found in many real-time strategies.

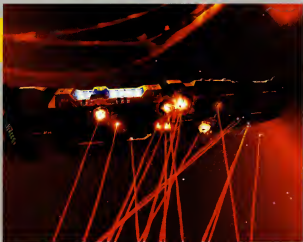
What can fans and newcomers expect from this fall's *Homeworld 2*? For one, the same level of polish is evident in the demo GMR played. The story continues the epic saga of the Hilarans and their leader Karan S'jet as they defend the homeworld they were both exiled from and returned to in the first game. With an armada of capital ships bristling with cannons and swift fighters, you'll battle vast fleets of enemy ships equipped with all kinds of nasty tricks.

A new graphics engine makes for some unbelievably gorgeous spacescapes that include swirling nebulae, huge dying planets, and glittering star fields. The up-close action on the ships is more detailed, which allows things like turrets on capital ships to have their own animations. This increased detail is important for gameplay, too. Now, you can target specific systems, like engines and docking bays.

Homeworld 2 has all the best aspects of *Homeworld*, as well as a slightly faster pace and an easier-to-use interface that should settle the few complaints about the first game. Sounds out of this world to us. **B+**

GMR SAYS → Excepting *Half Life 2*, this is our most anticipated PC game of the fall.

➔ HOW HOT... 🔥🔥🔥🔥



RELEASE | AUGUST

BUFFY: CHAOS BLEEDS

DIRECTOR GCMPS/2008 PUBLISHER WINDY UNIVERSAL DEVELOPER EUROCOM

WELCOME TO THE SLAYGROUND

➔ Not even cancellation of her TV show can stop *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Vampire Slayer: Chaos Bleeds*. The popular heroine will once again be staking—please note the delicious pun—a claim to videogame glory with the upcoming multipatform *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Chaos Bleeds*.

Bleeds serves up a lost episode of sorts, with players taking the role of Buffy as well as some of her closest compatriots in a fight against all manner of undead pests. The third-person 3D adventure boasts six different playable characters, including Buffy, slayer Faith, ventriloquist's dummy Sid, sorceress Willow, vampire Spike, and straight-man Xander.

Developer Eurocom has done a fine job of taking over the reigns from The Collective, developer of the first (Xbox only) *Buffy* title. The

fighting engine is smooth, allowing for nifty punch-kick combinations, and Eurocom has improved on the original by creating such offensive moves as spells for Willow and new weapons for the other characters in the form of swords and axes.

An early build boasts such goodies as a brief fight scene in which the player-controlled Buffy stomps ass while an A.I.-fueled Willow provides backup by tossing sun spells at incoming vampires, and a locked-room puzzle involving a midget doll and explosives. Sadly, the game's new multiplayer mode was unavailable for testing, but the mere hint of playing this with pals is impetuous enough to tap the vein and enjoy the sanguine results. **B+**

GMR SAYS → Suck it, dwarf!

➔ HOW HOT... 🔥🔥🔥🔥



SHINING SOUL

DIRECTOR GBA PUBLISHER ATLUS SOFTWARE DEVELOPER SEGA

Ever wanted to play a cartoonish brawler game that uses the *Shining* (as in *Shining Force*) license to animal effect? Well then, you're in luck, since it just so happens that Atlus is releasing Sega's portable dungeon crawler for GBA. Just in time to save our Linn cables from extinction. Up to four friends can play together while tethered by cables—just like heroes huddled around an old drunk

RELEASE | SEPTEMBER



➔ HOW HOT... 🔥🔥



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RELEASE | SEPTEMBER

1080° AVALANCHE

SYSTEM: GC PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPER: NST

BEFORE THERE WAS SSX...

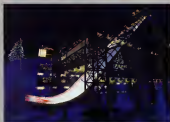
➔ As longtime Nintendo fans may remember, the original N64 snowboarding game ruled the genre back in '98, back before extreme-sports games became a \$500 trillion (by our pseudo-scientific approximation) industry. Finally, Nintendo is putting the finishing touches on the GameCube sequel. (A five-year wait for a new game in a beloved series? Ho-ho, that's Nintendo all right!)

So, will it be worth the wait? Recent hands-on playtime left us optimistic. One to four players can explore multiple paths down Avalanche's different courses, some that open up only after you trigger rock slides, cave-ins, collapsing bridges, or (of course) avalanches. If you need to outrun these natural disasters, you can tuck in on the

straightaways (make sure to enjoy the nice blurring speed-effects!) As usual, button and stick combos produce grabs, fakies, and other hot-dog maneuvers, while spinning is currently assigned to a single button—the R trigger. That's right, simply hold it down and watch yourself whirl. Whether this proves to be a welcome simplification of the sport or a heavy-handed dumbing down of the controls, however, remains to be seen. On the other hand, landing safely after catching big air is now a little bit more complicated—you'll have to spin the analog stick to regain your balance, or you'll risk bailing. ☹

GMA SAYS → So far so good, but will it have what it takes to stand out in this crowded genre?

➔ HOW HOT... 🔥🔥🔥



RELEASE | SEPTEMBER

DISNEY'S EXTREME SKATE

SYSTEM: GB/GP/PS2/GB PUBLISHER: ACTIVISION DEVELOPER: DISNEY INTERACTIVE

BOARD TO INFINITY—AND BEYOND!

➔ In all fairness, Disney's *Extreme Skate Adventure* contains all the extremity of, say, a box of animal crackers. Thank sweet heaven someone decided that if this game was going to be made, it should at least be built on the wonderful Tony Hawk engine.

Disney icons Buzz Lightyear, Woody, Simba, Pumba, and Timon (among others) plow through such

themed stages as Andy's room and the elephant's graveyard, perform tricks, collect points and goodies, and unlock secret stuff of all sorts. Built for kids, this one looks so good and plays so well, it may prove to be an adventure savored by all ages. ☹

GMA SAYS → It's Tony Hawk's world, we just want to skate all over it.

➔ HOW HOT... 🔥🔥🔥



RELEASE | SEPTEMBER

NHL 2004

SYSTEM: GP/PS2/GB PUBLISHER: ELECTRONIC ARTS DEVELOPER: EA SPORTS

HOME-ICE ADVANTAGE: ONLINE

➔ We recently received a rough build of *NHL 2004* and found that the game is already showing signs of continuing the EA dynasty. First and foremost, PS2 (only) online play is now possible via the Network Adaptor, and though we can't confirm whether this will be in the final version, there are icons for a 10-player game on a single system.

Other treats include more than 80 NHL and international teams, new animations, freestyle deking, ice sprays, authentic color commentary, and—proving that EA takes its game reviews seriously—a Tutorial mode. The button-mashing fighting system of the past has been replaced with

more accurate brawling that includes wild haymakers and the ever-popular jersey grabbing. Check this space for an updated preview soon. ☹

GMA SAYS → EA updated its fighting series, and a hockey game broke out.

➔ HOW HOT... 🔥🔥🔥



BATTLESTAR GALACTICA

SYSTEM: PS2/GB PUBLISHER: VANGUARD UNIVERSAL DEVELOPER: WARPING

Strap on the space boots of one William Adama, a mouthy pilot on the Battlestar Galactica, and get ready for deep-voice dialogue! Adama, you say? This proposal is set 40 years before the TV series, which seems it's your job to blast the Cylons, keep the Galactica in one piece, and get Adama promoted. Expect plenty of fan service and hope that Warring can keep this more tongueless than ham fistful.

RELEASE | AUGUST



A full-page action photograph of a football player, likely a running back, in a black jersey with the number 7. He is running with the football in his right hand, looking forward. He is wearing a black helmet with a white face mask and white pants with black socks. The background is dark and blurry, showing other players in white jerseys. The text "A PLAYMAKER SCRAMBLES DEFENSES FOR BREAKFAST." is overlaid in yellow, bold, italicized capital letters on the left side of the image.

***A PLAYMAKER
SCRAMBLES DEFENSES FOR BREAKFAST.***

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GAME BOY ADVANCE

PlayStation 2



[illegible]

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MADDEN2004.COM

AOL KEYWORD: Madden NFL 2004



RELEASE | SEPTEMBER

ROGUE OPS

 DEVELOPER: GCP/5/NB
 PUBLISHER: KEMCO
 DEVELOPER: BITS STUDIOS

SAM FISHER'S LOST LOVE?

➔ **Metal Gear Solid and Splinter Cell.** There, now that we have that out of the way, let's take a look at Kemco's new action-stealth game, *Rogue Ops*, appearing on multiple platforms in October. In the not-too-distant future, ex-Green Beret Nikki Connors lurks silently in the darkness, ready to crack a neck at a moment's notice.

All the usual genre staples appear in one form or another: using shadows to avoid detection, hiding bodies to avoid detection, using bloodless kills to avoid detection, and employing cool high-tech gadgets...to help you avoid detection. *Rogue Ops* features some fairly crafty level design that presents multiple objectives with

multiple ways of completing them. There are some situations where going balls-to-the-wall with gunfire isn't going to work—partly because your character is a girl, but mostly because you don't want to draw too much attention to yourself. You don't want to see those guards hunting you down with level-three tenacity—it's not very pretty.

It looks as if *Rogue Ops* is contributing some new ideas to the stealth subgenre, and new is always a good thing. Hopefully, this one won't sneak by without anybody noticing. ☞

GMA SAYS → Looks good so far, but lose the generic title. How about *Action Game*?

HOW HOT... 🔥🔥🔥

ALIAS

 DEVELOPER: PC/PS2/NB
 PUBLISHER: ACCLAIM
 DEVELOPER: ACCLAIM CHELTENHAM

ACCLAIM GARNERS JEN. MILLIONS MAKE MERRY

➔ Acclaim could release a box containing a slip of paper with the words "Sorry, sucker!" in it, and it would sell like glazed doughnuts at a Weight Watchers meeting if it had a picture of Alias star Jennifer Garner on its cover. Come fall, game fans will have their box with Garner's stunning visage on it, and, as an added bonus, it will come with an intriguing third-person adventure and swanky instruction manual.

Alias captures the look and feel of the hit ABC TV show, with players battling the forces of insensate evil as spunky CIA agent Sydney Bristow. The game will feature a brand-new story with an as-yet-unrevealed plot penned by the show's writers. The developer promises that criminal group SD-6 and its villainous head Arvin Sloane will feature prominently in Sydney's interactive adventure, but no other details have yet been released.

At May's E3, *Alias* emerged as Acclaim's most intriguing title. Emphasizing stealth as

part of its play, *Alias* lets Bristow dress up in different costumes (impersonating a dance hall floozy and a doctor, for example) to infiltrate secure areas and fool various guards. Bristow will be aided in-game by her handler and love interest, Vaughn, and she will have access to high-tech goodies such as DNA samplers, night-vision goggles, and EMP guns.

Animations in the E3 demo seemed unusually awkward (Ms. Bristow's movements, for example, are more than a little on the stiff side), yet everything else here seemed fine. *Alias* even showed small flashes of inspiration, such as when the screen splits dramatically to show Sydney entering a dangerous situation or encountering an impending threat. *Alias* is hotter than a clambake on Mercury, so if Acclaim doesn't come through, it must forever agree to take the following alias: mud. ☞

GMA SAYS → *Alias*. Tired Radar? Lord, we hope not.

→ HOW HOT... 🔥🔥🔥



GOTHIC II

 DEVELOPER: PC
 PUBLISHER: ADAM
 DEVELOPER: PRIMARIS BYTES

In the massive world that is Gothic II, peasants work, beasts haunt the woods, and you decide whose ass is going to get kicked. Pick a profession (goodly, goody, patch, magic-slinging wizard, or ruthless mercenary) and watch your popularity soar or wane. With a variety of places to go and plenty of random events to encounter, this RPG/action/adventure hybrid could be a huge time killer.

RELEASE | OCTOBER



→ HOW HOT... 🔥🔥🔥

INCOMING GAMES

KILL SWITCH → Freedom Fighters → SPONGEBOB SQUAREPANTS: DANCE FOR BIRTH DANCE

» NEXT

RELEASE | OCTOBER

KILL SWITCH

DEVELOPER: PS2/PS3 | PUBLISHER: NAMCO | DEVELOPER: NAMCO HOMETEC

GIMME SHELTER

➔ As anyone who's ever been shot at can tell you, having a large, solid obstruction between you and the bullet helps with the whole self-preservation thing. Such is the basis of Namco's *kill switch*, an action-shooter that relies less on the one-man-army-with-guns-a-blaazin' cliché and more on the intelligent use of your environments as protective cover—because that's the only way you're going to survive.

Holding down the left trigger initiates the Cover mode. In this mode, you can poke your head up and shoot with lethal precision. If you just need to take some heat off, you can use a less-accurate blindfire maneuver, which sends hostile targets back into their cover positions. Almost everything in the environment can be used as cover: walls, furniture, support

columns, rusted-out cars, stacks of rubber tires...and they all provide different degrees of protection. But spend too much time hiding from your troubles, and your troubles will come looking for you. Weapons include assorted flavors of machine gun, and grenades in the flash and limb-removing varieties. Flash grenades will temporarily render enemies blind and deaf (and you, too, if you don't throw them far enough), and the explosive grenades...well, everybody knows what those are capable of.

Namco promises an intriguing story (start thinking about the meaning of the title if you want a head-start) that spans 16 levels of hide-and-go-kill action. **E+**

GMA SAYS ➔ One could say Namco's got you covered, but we won't. That's lame.

➔ HOW HOT... 🔥🔥🔥



RELEASE | SEPTEMBER

FREEDOM FIGHTERS

DEVELOPER: SCE/CAPCOM | PUBLISHER: EA | DEVELOPER: IO INTERACTIVE

OR WOULD THAT BE FRENCH FICTIONS?

➔ Squad-based shooters sound like a great idea because you imagine yourself sitting back sipping piña colodas while your teammates do all the dirty work. But in practice, the often-complex process of giving orders to your troops can severely cut into your drinking time. Enter *Freedom Fighters*, a fast-paced third-person shooting game from the maker of the *Hitman* series, in which commanding soldiers takes only a few quick button presses.

In an alternate world, the Soviet Union has invaded the United States and you—NYC inhabitant and plumber Chris Stone—must recruit other rebellious New Yorkers to take up arms. You'll begin *Freedom Fighters* with enough charisma to convince one fellow civilian to join your cause, but as you retake military bases, you'll eventually be able to lead up to 12 fighters at once. You order troops individually or as a group to follow you, scout out an area, or defend a designated location. Giving commands takes only a second, so you can make your guerrillas flank an enemy without having to pause from the action.

You have the right to bear an array of guns, grenades, Molotov cocktails, and gun turrets, as well as the freedom to select missions in any order. Is a well-stocked enemy base giving you a hard time? Take out the gas station and you'll find it leaner and considerably easier when you visit again. Next stop, Liberty Island. **E+**

GMA SAYS ➔ Where *Hitman 2* was exacting and slow, *Freedom Fighters* is fast and explosive.

➔ HOW HOT... 🔥🔥🔥



SPONGEBOB SQUAREPANTS: BBB

DEVELOPER: PS2/PS3 | PUBLISHER: THQ | DEVELOPER: NEAR HORN

Rise from kindergarten to college, major themes in all new adventure starring your favorite unoffensive sea creature. Battle for Bikini Bottom: Two players getting SpongeBob, Sandy, Patrick and the Starfish across eight worlds. Missions include Bubble Blowing, Tongue Boarding, and Underwear Bungee Jumping. Cool voiceovers and an offbeat sense of humor should make this a fitting gift for the desecrating child—or stoner—in your life.

RELEASE | OCTOBER



james bond 007: everything or nothing → mario & luigi → wallace and gromit in project zoo



JAMES BOND 007: EON

CREATOR: GRAVITYSOX DEVELOPER: EA

SHAKEN. IN THIRD PERSON. THAT IS

Who'd have thought that James Bond's games could become predictably better than his movies? With *NightFire*, Electronic Arts proved that 007 characters could shine even when a game wasn't based on a Bond film. With *Everything or Nothing*, EA's going further, bringing in 007 scribe Bruce Fierstein for movie-quality scenarios, body-scanning and voice-capturing Pierce Brosnan, plus hiring actress Shannon Elizabeth to play Bond's new girl, Serena St. Germaine.

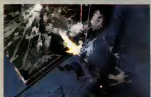
The only potential hitch: gameplay. EA's swapping tried-and-true first-person 007 shooting for third-person action. Moreover, tricky-to-implement hand-to-hand combat has been added to Bond's standard guns and gadgets,

while stealth, disguise, and rappelling now become necessary over 20 levels. GameCubing Q-wannabes can use GBAs to control gadgets. Also new are two-player cooperative missions—even Shannon will likely join the action.

Changes aside, *EON* is a fairly surefire hit. Numerous proven elements appear, including international locales from Peru to Russia, classic Bond enemies (think Jaws!), vehicle scenes (think cars, helicopters, motorcycles, and tanks), and four-player play (think getting shot repeatedly by a Walther PPK). **E+**

GMA SAYS → With stakes this high, we're betting big on Bond's latest adventure.

→ HOW HOT...



MARIO & LUIGI

SYSTEM: GBA DEVELOPER: NINTENDO

KEEPING IT IN THE FAMILY

Surprisingly, *Paper Mario* was one of the RPG-starved N64's most underappreciated games. Whether that was due to it being released late in the console's life cycle or its charming elementary-school aesthetic or just the fact that Square (developer of the original *Super Mario RPG*) wasn't involved...it doesn't really matter. Lots of people missed out on a great game. Nintendo is rewarding those of us with good taste with a brand-new RPG, one especially tailored for *Paper Mario* fans.

When we last saw Luigi, he was sulking in his "secret" basement hideout, jealous of his brother's abundant adventure opportunities. But now the call has been made: Mario

needs help. You control both characters (unfortunately, it's only a one-player game): Mario with the A button, Luigi with the B button. In the overworld, Mario and Luigi jump onto platforms or underneath stone blocks; during battle, each sibling can launch an individual attack (like Jump or Hammer, or they can team up for a combo move. As in *Paper Mario*, timing your button presses plays a crucial role in determining damage. As you can probably tell, we really enjoyed *Paper Mario*—hopefully Mario & Luigi stays true to that great game's spirit. **E+**

GMA SAYS → Not every RPG needs to be an FMV-ridden quest of epic proportions you know

→ HOW HOT...

WALLACE & GROMIT IN PROJECT ZOO

SYSTEM: GCP/PS2/GB DEVELOPER: B&M

Feathers McGraw (penguin, chicken, hyperactive, criminally misanthropic) has been over the zoo, and it's up to Wallace and Gromit to sneak in—via Trolley penguin—to foil his plans in this gadget-filled platformer. True to the award-winning clay-animated roles, loyal Gromit braves Feathers's henchmen, while Wallace builds deviously helpful contraptions such as the porridge gun, gyrocopter, and spring boots.

RELEASE: OCTOBER



→ HOW HOT...

JIVE TURKEYS

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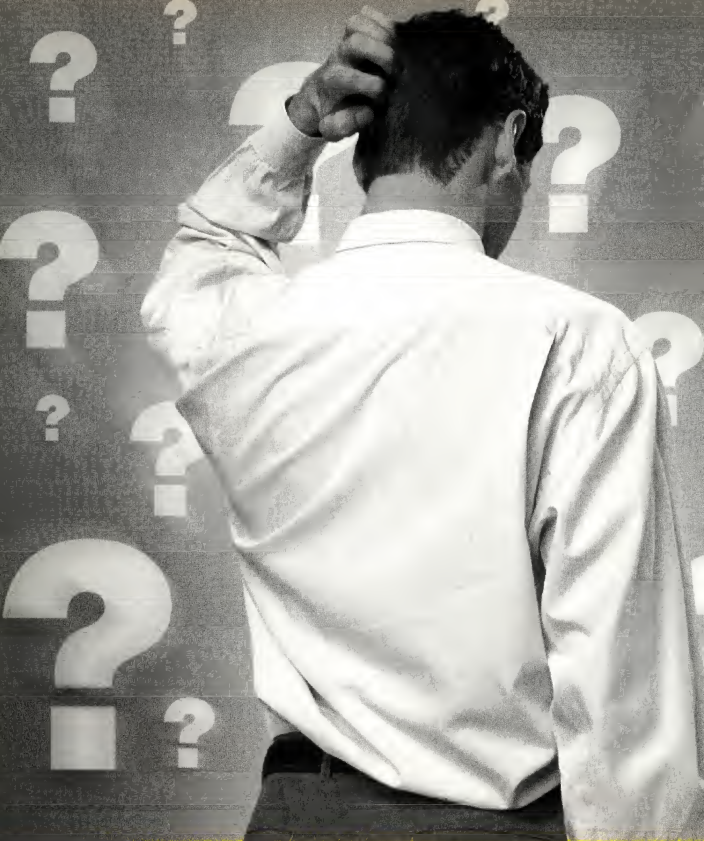
PlayStation 2



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RELEASE | NOVEMBER

METAL ARMS

SYSTEM: GC/PS2/XB PUBLISHER: VIVID UNIVERSAL DEVELOPER: SWINGIN' APE

MY FIRST HALO

As evidenced by the success of Insomniac's *Ratchet & Clank*, cute-as-a-button characters and gratuitous gunplay go together quite nicely, thank you very much. With an emphasis on explosive action, *Metal Arms: A Glitch in the System*, Vivendi Universal's forthcoming run-n-jump-n-shoot-em-up, has its sights set squarely on similarly irreverent territory.

A third-person shooter, *Metal Arms* features just enough story to talk its audience into devastating foes (and their surroundings) with extreme prejudice. General Corrosive has enslaved the Droids, the working class on the planet Iron Star. This is a robots-only sort of place, so don't expect too much by way of flora and fauna. As the heroic, half-ton Glitch, players run-n-gun through more than 50 missions spanning six environments. Developer Swingin'

Ape has sensibly recycled some of the best aspects of some of the best games in recent memory. Looking and moving around feels akin to controlling your movements in *Halo* [so then, no complaints there], while Glitch's considerable array of weapons and gadgets are accessible at the click of the trigger, onscreen and on the fly, à la *Metal Gear Solid*.

Cute and competent, *Metal Arms* is on track to be an entertaining, if not exactly inspired shooter. The controls and animation are already finely tuned, and the developers have clearly gone to great pains to provide plenty of explosive material. Will there be enough variety to keep our trigger fingers suitably salivated? We're happy to wait and see... **B+**

GMA SAYS → You know, for kids.

→ HOW HOT...

RATCHET & CLANK: GC

SYSTEM: PS2 PUBLISHER: SONY DEVELOPER: LUCASARTS

READY FOR THE LIMELIGHT?

The original *Ratchet & Clank* may not have turned the world on its rabby-alien ear, but Insomniac's planned a few tricks — tricks that should please fans and bring even a few more into the fold.

Having saved one galaxy, furry Ratchet and his tin buddy have become commandos for MegaCorp. In a recent demo build, Ratchet, sent to curtail the activities of the evil Thugs-4-Less mercenaries with the business end of his wrench, busts lots of robo-reptile skull, participates in a televised Arena fight, and destroys a jamming planetoid.

The planetoid showcases Insomniac's new "spherical world" technology, allowing the duo to bound about in tiny, open-ended globes of fun. So far, these cartoon-inspired

worlds don't seem to offer much in the way of new gameplay, but the presentation is novel nonetheless.

What else is new? Ratchet now upgrades his health and weapons by fighting, allowing you to customize his massive arsenal to your liking. And, of course, the graphics are even better, sporting larger environments, more Disney-quality animation, and legions of enemies. If the slowdown disappears, it'll be perfect.

Due in November, *Going Commandos* already tops the first game's stellar production values and improves upon overall play experience. Will it prove a bigger hit? Only time will tell. **B+**

GMA SAYS → Will Ratchet & Clank again play second fiddle to Naughty Dog's *Jak and Daxter*?

→ HOW HOT...



MEDAL OF HONOR: RISING SUN

SYSTEM: GC/PS2/XB PUBLISHER: EA DEVELOPER: EA

There may be too many WWII games out there, but none quite like *Medal of Honor: The Superior First-person Shooter* series is returning for duty, but this time, on the other side of the world. Get ready for some intense jungle action as you fight your way from Pearl Harbor (a set piece to rival even *Call of Duty's* D-Day scene) to the sandy, blood-soaked beaches of Iwo Jima.

RELEASE | NOVEMBER



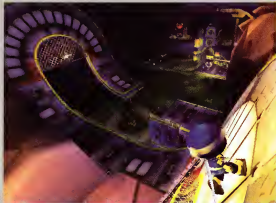
→ HOW HOT...

INCOMING GAMES

Yin-Ya → mōko → champions of norrath (realms of everquest)

» NEXT

RELEASE | NOVEMBER



I-NINJA

DEVELOPER: GCM/PS2 DEVELOPER: NINJA DEVELOPER: ARGONAUT

I-NINJA: THEREFORE I AM

➔ The grizzled gaming veterans among you (don't worry, we practice a don't-ask, don't-tell policy here at GMR) will recall Argonaut as a top-flight Super NES developer that used the Super FX chip of its own co-design to explore the new frontier of three-dimensional graphics in such classics as *Stunt Race FX* and *Star Fox*. Alas, Argonaut's most recent project, the much-hyped *Malice*, is trapped in Development Hell and struggling to escape, leaving *I-Ninja* as the developer's only current console project: a cute, irreverent PS2 platformer that rips meaty gameplay chunks from many other games.

Of the four levels in our brisk playable demo, only two feature mostly traditional platform-game mechanics, as *I-Ninja* jumps, climbs, and slashes his foes. But they also

include rail-grinds and hat-pipes, which the game shows you how to use in nifty real-time demos called up by hitting the SELECT button. Another level has you steering a giant eyeball (!) down a treacherous tunnel, plowing right into bowling-pin formations of enemy ninjas. Yet another has you engaging in a first-person giant-robot boxing match. It's a schizophrenic style that comes off as a clever amalgam, thanks in no small part to the consistent visual style and kickin' drum-and-bass soundtrack. Still not sold? Ex Disney men Don Bluth and Gary Goldman (*Dragon's Lair*, *The Secret of N.I.M.H.*) have recently signed on for CG duty. ☛

GMA SAYS → A smooth engine, solid gameplay, and goofy humor may well make for quite the sleeper hit.

➔ HOW HOT...



XB

RELEASE | NOVEMBER

MAFIA

DEVELOPER: PS3/XB DEVELOPER: GATHERING OF DEVELOPERS DEVELOPER: ILLUSION SOFTWARES

UNMADE MEN NEED NOT APPLY

➔ Released last year for the PC, *Mafia* is a riveting 1930s-themed combination of *Max Payne* and *Grand Theft Auto* (a combo also seen in Sony's *The Godfather*), and one of 2002's most glowingly reviewed titles. Now, *Mafia* is taking the dangerous road from PC to console and introducing the rest of the gaming world to Tommy Angelo, a cab driver who unwittingly becomes embroiled in a war between rival families for control of the City of Lost Heaven. Each of *Mafia*'s 20 levels is teeming with brilliant and intense *Medal of Honor*-esque set pieces, in which Tommy and his mo-capped enemies blast each other with machine guns and hack at each other with knives.

Unlike all too many ill-advised conversions that dumb down the original

gameplay for consoles, *Mafia*'s developers are only making changes for the better. For example, while the PC version's cars handle like school buses—an intentional decision to reflect the primitive state of 1930s automotive “technology”—the console versions’ vehicles are closer to *Vice City* in speed and performance, placing fun over realism. Best of all, *Mafia*'s killer PC graphics are being brought to consoles with virtually no loss of detail; all the PC version's touches, such as bullet-gored vintage cars after nasty firefights, are making the journey intact. ☛

GMA SAYS → *Mafia* was one of the highest-rated PC games of 2002, and the PS2/Xbox conversions are on track to make this an offer console gamers can't refuse.

➔ HOW HOT...



PS2

GC

CHAMPIONS OF NORRATH: REALMS OF EQ

DEVELOPER: PS2 DEVELOPER: SOE DEVELOPER: SNOWBUND STUDIOS

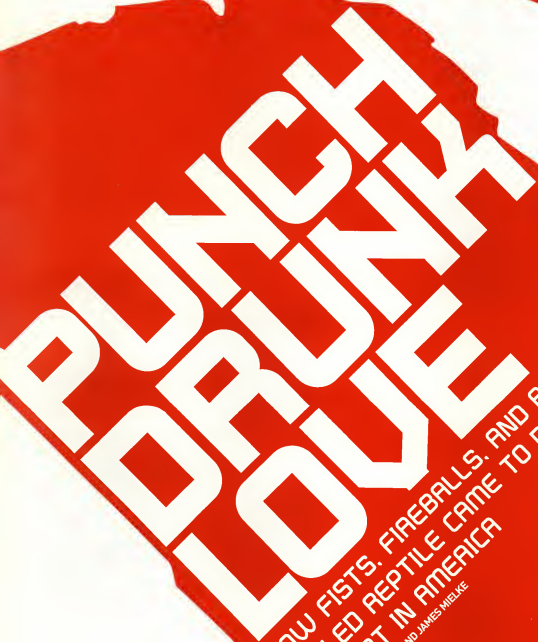
For a feel for what this EverQuest adventure is about, take the swank, slickness of *Battle for Dune*, Dark Alliance and their crew up the next, and rivalry. It is Dune II. A dragon's ter of features needs you randomized dungeons, 5000 plus items to find, branching skill trees for each of five character classes, and most important, online multiplayer support for four—and just in time for Christmas!

RELEASE | NOVEMBER



➔ HOW HOT...






PUNCH DROUNK LOVE

HOW FISTS, FIREBALLS, AND A GREEN DUDE
CALLED REPTILE CAME TO DEFINE VIDEO
COMBAT IN AMERICA

WORDS: JON DUDLAK AND JAMES MELKE



EVERYBODY WASN'T KUNG FU FIGHTING

➔ What the hell did teenagers do before fighting games? For the past 20 years, America's youth has been taking out its myriad aggressions on one another behind molded plastic controls. Adolescent spats have been swiftly solved or grossly exacerbated in front of the television or in dank shopping-mall arcades by going a few dozen heated rounds with these competitive catalysts. These games have helped shape a \$20 billion industry, formed friendships and clubs between players all over the planet, and even created careers for the truly hardcore addicts. But like most modern cultural phenomena, fighting games and the businesses they've fostered have humble beginnings...in the '70s.

Head-to-head competition has been an integral part of gaming since the birth of arcade games. Atari built 1972 videogame pioneer Pong for a pair of human paddle jockeys, 1974's *Tank* featured twin sticks for each of the two combatants, and Midway

brought Taito's primitive two-player shooter *Gunfight* over from Japan in 1975. During this period, folks were no strangers to competitive coin-ops, but they had never come to fistcuffs—the technology just wasn't slick enough to handle the demanding graphics and animation of a proper punch-and-kick fighter.

THE KARATE KID

The budding arcade scene didn't see a true brawler until 1984, when inconspicuous Japanese developer Technos (the brains behind seminal side-scroller *Double Dragon*) created a kumite-style sparring game called *Karate Champ*. Publisher Data East—whose positive contributions to gaming (*Burger Time*) were later nullified by its crimes against humanity (*Caveman Games*, *Fighter's History*)—distributed the arcade fighter in America. It also brought a watered-down version to Nintendo's 8-bit NES, which had settled into nearly 20 million homes by the end of the decade and helped make arcade ports like *Karate Champ* a

good deal more popular in 1986.

Just about all that gamers got with *Karate Champ* were fighters in rudimentary karate dress performing simple punch-and-kick actions. Barely a year after its release, competitor Konami took the two-player-simultaneous model several leaps further with *Yie Ar Kung-Fu*. Despite its marketing nightmare of a name, *Yie Ar* turned heads in America with several new innovations: It introduced projectiles and special attacks, established the tournament-style pacing that permeates the genre today, and gave enemies individual personalities through unique weapons and fighting styles. The only drawback: Unfortunate human contenders had to play as the same weak, nondescript fighter throughout the game. *Yie Ar* represented great advances in programming for its time, but it wasn't long before gamers wanted to perform the same kinds of cool attacks their opponents had.

If the chubby, fireball-tossing guy from *Yie Ar Kung-Fu* knew how he'd influence the 1→

MOONLIGHTING

→ What major franchise hasn't done a little cross-genre experimentation? These fighting games have tried it with mixed results:



SAMURAI SHODOWN RPG
A decent spin-off that follows the story lines of *Samurai Shodown 1* and *2* through the eyes of one of six Sam Shō characters.
Rating: STRONG



SUPER PUZZLE FIGHTER II
A smart, addictive puzzle game with *Street Fighter* characters keeping a low profile as mascots, of sorts.
Rating: FIERCE



VIRTUA FIGHTER KIDS
Virtua Fighter 2's cast with gigantic heads and novelty play mechanics—not worth tracking down a Sega Saturn to play.
Rating: JAB



SNK VS. CAPCOM: CARD FIGHTERS CLASH
A well-received competitive card-based title starring the best of both publishers' fighter stock. It arrived on the short-lived Neo Geo Pocket console in two versions.
Rating: FIERCE



→ programmers of tomorrow back in '85, he probably would have secured some kind of royalty rights at the time. It took only a couple of years for veteran arcade and NES developer Capcom to realize the potential of fighting games in the arcade market. Building on the groundwork laid by Technos and Konami, in 1987 Capcom used the first *Street Fighter* game to market the fighting genre to a more mainstream audience.

FIGHTING IN THE STREET

In retrospect, the original *Street Fighter* was a black sheep in the huge family of games that would succeed it. Simple and awkward, *Street Fighter* introduced its fighters Ken and Ryu as two identical opponents. Clumsy controls, mediocre animation, and a dearth of playable characters kept this title from greatness for goodness, even, but it got the ball rolling for something much bigger.

Connected it had a good thing in *Street Fighter*. Capcom took a few years to develop new hardware architecture that would give the franchise some backbone. Its CPS mainboard updated

→ Love it or not, *Dead or Alive 2: Hardcore* opened up the fighting arena, literally, with huge "love-its," some up to three tiers large.

versions of which have carried every *Street Fighter* game to date! allowed the developers to overcome issues that hampered the fighting genre in general: lagging controls, choppy animation, tinny sound, and sloppy hit detection [discrepancies between how the gamer and computer perceive interaction between players onscreen]. The new chipset was unveiled for *Street Fighter II* in 1991. It provided lush animated backdrops, thick, textured audio with actual digitized voices; and, most important, eight intricate fighters. Including series pioneers Ken and Ryu! that responded to the user's inputs with split-second reactions. Capcom invented a well-balanced fighter that was horribly and mercilessly addictive. *Street Fighter II* was miles ahead of anything anyone had played, and it choked arcades with herds of clamoring gamers for months.

Street Fighter is the longest-running, most-remade

PUNCH-DRUNK LOVE
Some of the history of fighting games



→ Pezeman was a secret character in the Japanese version of *Puzzle Fighter vs. Samurai*. Capcom vs. SNK 2's secret boss, who resembles both *Street Fighter II* and *Street Fighter 3*, is said to be the best fighting animal.



→ Although the graphics and sophistication have certainly evolved, fighting games really haven't changed all that much over the last 20 years or so. Games like *Karate Champ* (left), *Ye Ar Kung Fu* (center) and even the original *Street Fighter* (right) all feature little men squaring off against each other from left to right.



← King of Fighters is like a reliable, unfashionable friend who never goes away, and we love it for that. Gully Bear continues to impress with its fierce graphics and fast gameplay.



FRIENDLY KOMPETITION

fighting-game series on the market. It's also a hacked arcade version with whacked-out supermoves (dubbed *Rainbow Edition*), a pseudo-3D conversion (EX series), a precursor (Alpha series), cross-genre offshoots (*Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo*), and a total remake (*Street Fighter III*) to name a few. It's also the series of choice for thousands of dedicated tournament players around the world because of its intricate combo systems and competitive, skill-dependent gameplay. You can check out worldwide rankings at fansite www.shoryuken.com—no joke.

As Capcom's new cash-cow property branched out, a whole slew of new fighting games sprang from its roots. Low-profile innovator SNK dished out a few gems (*Fatal Fury*, *Last Blade*, *King of Fighters* and the sexy *Samurai Shodown*) during the '90s (see the SNK breakdown page for details). Burgeoning British developer Rare unveiled a briefly popular combo-driven number called *Killer Instinct*. But *Street Fighter*'s biggest competitor at the arcades of the early '90s was a new title from Midway, a company that had spent the prior decade establishing a firm foothold in the coin-op arena. That game was *Mortal Kombat*.

Mortal Kombat featured digitized motion-captured actors rather than hand-drawn sprites, providing an eerie realism to the action...but that's not why people liked it. It introduced hidden characters as Easter eggs that could be found through a bit of intuition of luck and skill...but that's not why people played it. *Mortal Kombat* introduced the shock factor with its inclusion of blood and fatalities," co-creator Ed Boon explains. "You could put your opponent's bloody spine out of his body, and that's why people dunked quarter after quarter into the machine. "While this didn't affect the actual play mechanics," Boon says, "it did direct more attention to the game than it would have gotten without the violence. It also provided yet another layer of hidden features, in that players had to figure out for themselves how to execute these hidden fatality moves."

And *Mortal Kombat*, despite its gimmicky veil, wasn't just some empty fighter with a few neat tricks. It left ▶

MATINEE FODDER



Mortal Kombat and *Street Fighter* competed for quarters in arcades throughout the '90s. But who got the better end of the movie deal?

FRANCHISE: *MORTAL KOMBAT*
MOVIES: *MORTAL KOMBAT*, *MORTAL KOMBAT: ANNIHILATION*, *MORTAL KOMBAT: CONQUEST* (TV series)

HIGHLIGHT: Sub-Zero totally wows moviegoers by making his trademark ice ball in the first movie.

LOW POINTS: Classy scene featuring Sonja and Jax running from stock explosion footage in *MK: Annihilation*; pivotal character Sonja not the same broad from the first film

FRANCHISE: *STREET FIGHTER*
MOVIES: *STREET FIGHTER* (live action), assorted *STREET FIGHTER II* and *STREET FIGHTER ALPHA* (animated)

HIGHLIGHT: Animated *Street Fighter II* is actually pretty fun, and not just because of the steamy Chun-Li shower scene

LOW POINTS: Van Damme as Guile in live-action movie; Raul Julia's swan song

WINNER: *Street Fighter* "Finish him!" or something.

→ *Mortal Kombat II* upped the ante on the gore factor in fighting games (parents had a fit, with numerous types of " fatalities," like fatalities, fatalities, and in the pinnacle of Western retardation, friendships





c. The Dark-stained arena offers goofy, fast fighting fun, while Fighters Megumi Lee (see kick) versus Fighting Vipers and Virtua Fighters around using, of all things, the Hornet car from *Daytona USA*.



YOUR Z-AXIS IS SHOWING

With technology improving, some videogame developers used powerful new graphics engines to deliver more-realistic games across all genres.

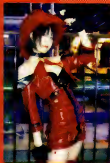
Japanese developer/publisher Sega, at the hand of visionary Yu Suzuki (*Afterburner*, *Shenmue*) and his *3DO* team, introduced a racing title in 1992 that used three-dimensional polygons to depict in-game objects, rather than the two-dimensional sprites that made up most games. *Virtua Racing*, in turn, provided the foundation for what would become the first full-3D fighting game, *Virtua Fighter*.

A combination of realistic martial-arts techniques and blocky yet fully defined characters made *Virtua Fighter* an instant favorite for a niche group of gamers. The third dimension opened a new array of offensive and defensive options, while a defined boundary, or ring, forced players to consider their position on the playing field—lest they be forced out of bounds for a loss.

While the *Virtua Fighter* series, right up to its fourth installment in 2001, has enjoyed great commercial success in Japan,



WHAT IS COSPLAY?



→ An interesting, and sometimes tragic, side-effect of videogames (fighting games in particular) is the phenomenon known as "cosplay." The Japanese bastardization of the words "costume play" has come to signify all that is strange in the world. Young folks, just like yourself, dress up in outfits designed to mimic their favorite fighting-game characters, which usually results in a sea of low-budget Chun Li's hamming for the camera. But, every once in a while you get a faze 'n' no (of Gutter Gear '22 barrel), and that makes us tingle on the inside. The whistles go WOO!

room for the player to think up custom combos and evermore embarrassing demises for his competition. Characters were faster, slightly smaller onscreen (which left more room for juggling and combining opponents), and significantly more graphic with their killing and maiming. Stage-specific fatalities put a greater premium on a victory—bragging rights were everything among the small cliques that would spend hours at arcades playing *MK2*. And skull-cracking players found ways to use extensive combo strings to turn an opponent's wrong moves into a guaranteed death sentence.

Most *Mortal Kombat* fans consider *MK2* the franchise's high point. The third rendition went over the top with wacky finishing sequences (animalities were particularly shameless), while a plethora of regular and cyborg ninjas with color-swapped outfits watered down an already bulky cast. *MK4* took the series in a whole new direction that pared down fans even further but reflected the latest trend in fighting games: the incorporation of a third dimension.

An intuitive pick-up-and-play control scheme has helped the *Tekken* series reel in casual gamers to this day.



For most Americans became disenchanted with it. Special moves require a keen sense of timing and skill that only the most dedicated gamers would take the time to master. For those who craved instant gratification,

Namco created *Tekken* in 1994. An intuitive pick-up-and-play control scheme has helped the *Tekken* series reel in casual gamers to this day. Check any college frat house or dorm, and you'll probably find some version of it running on a nearby PlayStation 2.

Tekken is still one of the most recognizable titles in videogames, but Namco's most noble contribution to fighting games came in 1997 when Sega released the ill-fated Dreamcast in America. Launched shortly after the release of Sega's hardware, *Soul Calibur* is actually a follow-up to a lesser-known arcade and PlayStation 1 fighter called *Soul Blade*. Because Dreamcast was more powerful than the PlayStation-based System-22 hardware, *Soul Calibur* was designed for, Namco was able to bring a better-than-perfect port of the hardcore coin-op sequel to

Sega's new system. It was the most intricate, graphically advanced fighter people had seen, and veteran gamers still consider it the best 3D fighter ever made. Unfortunately, its limited exposure on the poor-selling Dreamcast left tens of thousands of fighting gamers unaware of its charms. In August, Namco is distributing the highly anticipated sequel to all major consoles.

Any fighting gamer would likely acknowledge the genius behind a work like *Soul Calibur*, but not all of them would want to play it. The gameplay dynamics inherent to 3D fighting games differ significantly from those of 2D fighters, and most hardcore fans much prefer one style to the other. As 3D fighters continue to vastly outperform 2D offerings in the marketplace, however, the old-school fighting games will inevitably drop off the development schedule. A handful of sprite-based titles with cult followings (*Capcom vs. SNK*, *Guilty Gear X2*) keep the 2D genre alive, but the profitability of polygons has carved out a crystal-clear path for future fighters. ♦



→ *Marvel vs. Capcom 2* is chaos incarnate. Cyberbots is the spiritual predecessor to *Tekken*. *Romance*. *Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution* is simply super-tupper. *Pocket Fighter* is a favorite in the history of fighting games.



→ *Soul Calibur* for the Dreamcast set the genre on fire, and not just because of Volio's shameless crotch attacks. And don't forget about *Tekken 6*!

FIFTEEN CANDLES



→ Did you know that it's *Street Fighter*'s 15th anniversary? That's right. We've been playing *Street Fighter* games since 1988 and have never looked back, until now that is. Whether you're a Capcom fan, an SNK fan, or heck, even a *Butterfly Gear* fan, you can't deny that it's Capcom that started it all. Before the advent of *Street Fighter II*, the notion of half-circle motions, fireballs, and hurricane kicks didn't exist. One of the few games that can, to this day, still stand as an innovator, *Street Fighter* truly deserves a "Happy Birthday." A hundred wannabes have come and gone, but none has ever surpassed this classic series. Here's looking at ya.



READY TO FIGHT

SURE TO SPARK RIOTS ON THE INTERNET, GMR PUTS ITS MOUTHPIECE IN AND PICKS THE FIVE GAMES EVERY FIGHTING-GAME FAN SHOULD OWN. ONLY THE CREAM RISES TO THE TOP. NOSTALGIA NEED NOT APPLY.

No. 5 FATAL FURY: MARK OF THE WOLVES (NEO-GEO/NEOCAST/2000)

For years, SNK had been mining the same 1/8-bit hardware to churn out endless sequels to its *Fatal Fury*, *King of Fighters*, *Art of Fighting*, and *World Heroes* games. Whereas Capcom eventually evolved beyond its dated CPS-1 hardware, SNK stuck to its MVS system, presumably saving on R&D expenses (although not saving quite enough to avoid bankruptcy). But with *Fatal Fury: Mark of the Wolves*, the company finally proved it could hang with the competition, which by this point was the *Street*

Fighter III series. For the first time in the history of *Fatal Fury*, SNK ditched the bitmap character art for the hand-drawn anime-cel style of the recent *Street Fighter Alpha* games. Despite only one returning character (Terry Bogard) from the original *Fatal Fury* cast, *Mark of the Wolves* is the fastest, most beautiful, and technically accomplished fighter in SNK's storied history. Since the cartridge is prohibitively expensive (upwards of \$500), it's recommended that gamers seek out the near-perfect Dreamcast port.



No. 4 SOUL CALIBUR II (PS2/GC/BOX/2003)

While hardcore gamers who've been around might holler that the Dreamcast version of *Soul Calibur* is superior, it's hard to argue against its highly polished follow-up, *Soul Calibur II*, which is now happily available for all three major consoles. Although the classic original was groundbreaking for its time, the sequel is clearly better. More fighters, improved graphics, fewer cheap ring outs, added wall attacks, and the return of unique weapons for each character (borrowed from *Soul*

Blade) make this sequel the game to get. Each character's moves list has been fleshed out and improved, in the process balancing awkward discrepancies found in the Dreamcast game. While the addition of Todd McFarlane-designed characters is enough to put us off our lunch, even the presence of Naoe (and in the Xbox version, Spawn) cannot spoil what is one of the most beautiful, playable (by newbies and veterans alike) fighters ever created. This is the best 3D weapons fighter around.



No. 3 SAMURAI SHODOWN II (NEO-GEO/NEO)

Unless your local bowling alley still has an SNK MVS system (the kind with three or four games in one cabinet) installed, chances are you haven't been playing much *Samurai Shodown II* recently. Which is a damn shame, because this game is not only the epitome of the series, it's one of the most focused, hard-hitting fighting games around that has stood the test of time. For a game that came out in 1994, it's amazing how well it holds up. *Guilty Gear X2*, as fun as it is, wishes it were

Samurai Shodown II. Boasting sharp graphics, smooth animation, and a roster 14 characters strong (Gen-An and Chami Chami represent), the true star of *SS2* is the razor-sharp gameplay. Sadly, *SS2* was never ported to a console capable of doing it justice (its PlayStation port was crapped out, but never a "soft" Saturn version), except for the Neo-Geo CD, which CD-ROM is perfectly fine. Two sequels, *Samurai Shodown II* and *Samurai Shodown III: Amakusa's Revenge*, were released on both Saturn and PlayStation in Japan.

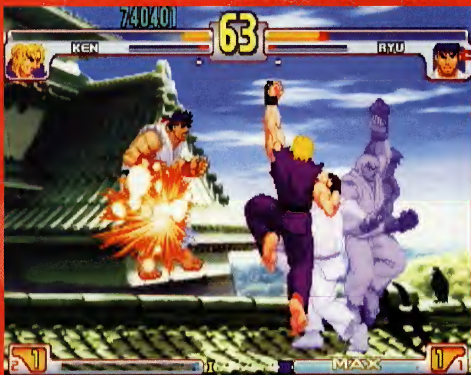


No. 2 VIRTUA FIGHTER 4: EVOLUTION (PS2/2003)

Sure, it's trendy to say *Virtua Fighter 4* is "the pinnacle of the series" (it is), but it's also 15 years anymore. We've since learned that "pinnacle" counterattacks like a bandit, and television, thank you very much. The series' impact on the game industry is undeniable. It invented the 3D fighting game after all. And for those who didn't know, *Virtua Fighter 4* for PS2 that AM2's technological showcase finally grabbed the masses in the way that the PlayStation Tekken had over the years. Part of the series' limited appeal

had to do with being exclusive to the underappreciated Sega hardware (Saturn, Dreamcast and the like), that the games were so deep, they required prior knowledge. But hundreds of thousands of players found a gem in *Virtua Fighter 4*, and with it, the Sega and Sega-verse, adding two new Tekken-style moves to the mix, a better balance, improved graphics, and the most addictive single-player mode in the history of fighting games, *Evo's* Quest mode. *Evolution* is the crown champion of 3D fighters.





→ *Street Fighter II* offers wonderfully classic Ryu vs. Ken matchups and the sheer absurdity of Street's Spinning Bird Kick for combat options. But a long list of brilliant new characters provides the real draw—busting out crazy moves with newacronyms like Fudo (literally "blow" as a follow-up to Fudo's Fudo) or Power to take only one hit. Abigail survives who fights exclusively with her fluff chattering over the more accomplished SFD duo.



No. 1 STREET FIGHTER III: THIRD STRIKE

(DREAMCAST/2000)

➔ *Resident Evil* saved Capcom's ass. It's no secret that the company was once on the brink of bankruptcy because it flooded shelves with more *Street Fighter II* sequels than the market could bear. Factor in the substantial cost of cartridge manufacturing and a lack of innovation between sequels (which would often come months apart), and it's a wonder the series survived at all. But thanks to some survival-horror games and a rejuvenation of the *Street Fighter* brand via the *Alpha* series, Capcom got back on its feet, enabling the company to finally ditch the trusty CPS-II hardware and move on to CPS-III territory. While the first CPS-III

game, *Warlord* (Red Earth in North America) was never ported to a home console, it was *Street Fighter III* that made gamers tremble. The game is a powerhouse of 2D graphics, with fluid Disney-esque levels of animation and gorgeous anime-cel character art.

Unfortunately, the game, in all of its iterations as *Street Fighter III: Street Fighter III: Double Impact*, and *Street Fighter III: Third Strike*, never quite captured the gaming zeitgeist as *Street Fighter II* did when it first appeared. You can thank the new wave of 3D fighters, like *Tekken*, for stealing SF3's thunder. By that time, it was clear the kids had moved on.

Still, that doesn't stop *Third Strike* from rocking like no one's business. The culmination of over 10 years worth of experience finessing the *Street Fighter II*, *Street Fighter Alpha*, and *Darkstalkers* series was poured into *Third Strike*, which added parries and a whole host of fine-tuned gameplay enhancements. It may feel slow when compared to Capcom's *Versus* games (like *Marvel vs. Capcom 2*), and it may not have the supersharp character art of the *Gusty Gear* games, but *Third Strike* remains to this day the glorious peak of fighting games, filled to the gills with pure 2D science. When challenged to a duel, this is our weapon of choice.

GBA
GC

TRUE PLAYER

GMA HANGS TOUGH WITH THE GANDOLFINI OF GAMING, SHIGERU MIYAMOTO (AS WELL AS TRANSLATOR EXTRAORDINAIRE, BILL TRINEN). MARIO'S DADDY WANTS TO TELL YOU SOMETHING...

ILLUSTRATION BY JASON BABLER

MAGICAL
MIYAMOTO
MOMENTS

Midnight is 20/20...



Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker, 1996
In a nutshell: Kick-started one of gaming's biggest franchises, among open worlds of RPGs with more accessible action combat.
GBA Rating: A- (7/10)



Super Mario Kart, 1992
In a nutshell: Kart races are commonplace now, but this was the U.S. Since say its light control is still unsurpassed.
GBA Rating: A- (7/10)



Super Mario 64, 1996
In a nutshell: It's the first true 3D platformer. Remarkably, it still stands up well to modern efforts, thanks to solid controls.
GBA Rating: A- (7/10)

MR: Regarding Nintendo's emphasis on connectivity over online play, it's easier for schoolkids to meet up and hang around and play Pac-Man than it is for thirty-somethings [your original audience] who grew up on games like *Donkey Kong* and *Mario Bros*. Doesn't this put a ceiling on your potential success?

SM: I don't really think we're necessarily limiting [our audience]. There are many different styles of gameplay that we can do with connectivity, and these are some of the ideas that we're showing. But Nintendo has had some smash hits with games like *Smash Bros.*, *Mario Kart*, and *GoldenEye*. Generally, a multiplayer game that sells a million copies is considered a pretty big success. And though those games are focused on the multiplayer aspect, they're still gone on to be big successes and many people play them. Much in the same way, we're looking at this idea of bringing people together to play games, and we're trying to create simple kinds of gameplay that appeal to a very broad audience. So it's not like we're specifically trying to focus the games on kids, but we're trying to create environments where people can play together.

Actually, you can play *Tetra's Trackers* one player, but obviously, if you were to play *Pac-Man* one player, it'd be pretty boring. [Laughs] And the other thing we're really focusing on is showing other developers, and especially our partners, the possibilities that we see with connectivity, so they can take this new system, implement it into their gameplay, and use it to creatively add new features and bring new ideas into gaming without focusing so much on trying to make the games more complex. We can try to attract users that way.

MR: So you're trying to set an example for stirring creativity in game design?

SM: Yeah, definitely. We're trying to provide examples and hints for people as to how they might be able to use this idea. With *Pac-Man*, that was a three-person team that put together a game that's very playable on the GC, and it's very fun.

MR: You're probably tired of hearing the online question, but a game like *F-Zero* seems like it'd be the perfect broadband application. Do you think online play has some sort of negative effect on gaming?

SM: You know, not so much. I don't really think online does something to the industry or is causing a trend we're not in favor of. Really, for me, the most basic element and most important element of entertainment is that it's got to be something that anybody can look at. Say you're walking down the street, you look in a window, see something that you think will interest you,

buy it, go home and play it. You jump right in and are entertained. Whereas the problem with online is that I think there are still a lot of people who don't have online capability. There's a barrier there, and you're essentially creating a product that is available and playable only by a certain group of people, and that's one reason why I don't like the online idea. The major reason, though, is that the business model is not there yet. We're not at a state where we could create an online game and have it be financially viable and sustainable, I think. I definitely think network play and what it does for gameplay is interesting.

MR: Does *F-Zero* support network play via LAN?

SM: It doesn't feature it right now, but we'll think about it. [Smiles] I'm sure if we did that, then all you guys on the magazine would be buying BBAs and TVs and linking up your GCs. Obviously, that's a very specialized environment where that's happening, but at the same time, it's interesting to see that happen, too.

MR: Switching gears, are you guys happy to have a game like *Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes* exclusively for GameCube?

SM: It's not the fact that it's exclusive that makes me happy. It's that for a long time Mr. Kojima has been telling me that he's wanted to work on Nintendo systems, and yet for some reason, the press has been claiming that he doesn't like the GameCube, when in fact, he's actually quite fond of it. For me, I'm just happy that we finally got this chance to work together on a project for GameCube.

MR: Are there any things that didn't work so well in the first *Pikmin* that you're adjusting for *Pikmin 2*?

SM: Other than the time limit, there wasn't a whole lot from the first game that we wanted to rethink. This time, what we really wanted to do was open players up to more of the world the *Pikmin* live in. There are a lot of funny things in there that I think people are going to be intrigued by.

MR: Let's talk about [aborted N64 project] *Jungle Emperor Leo*. You once said that [estate holder] Osamu Tezuka's son was distracted with other things...is there any chance, now that four or five years have gone by, that we could see that happen?

SM: I think [Tezuka] is actually more interested in doing movies and cinematic things. I still talk to him, but basically it was because the leader of that group at that time was more interested in the movie, and that's why we stopped the idea for the game. But because I do still talk to them, who knows, there might be a chance to do something in the future.

MR: What's the new *Metroid* GBA game about?

SM: What you know more about that game than I do. [Laughs]

MR: The theory going around is that it's a prequel to the original *Metroid*...

SM: Based on the information that we're giving at the show and from what we've heard from the development team, it's a series of events that take place sometime prior to or during the original NES story line.

MR: Do you think there's any space on the market to create something like that for GameCube? We've always wondered what a *Symphony of the Night* with amazing animation and detail would look like on PS2. Since a lot of people are going to play this new *Metroid* game on their GB player, do you think that there's any room in the market for a 2D game like *Metroid* designed for GameCube?

SM: I'm certain that if we were to make it, it would be much more beautiful than anything they could do in 2D on PlayStation 2! [Laughs]

One example would be the *Four Swords* for GameCube that's essentially using the same graphics as the SNES *Link to the Past*, but as you can see, we're using the power of the GC to do some really incredible effects with the smoke, as well as the number of enemies on the screen.

MR: But no one has done a really good next-gen 2D game yet. You always hear "2D won't sell anymore," but no one has actually tried.

SM: We've noticed that, and we can't talk about it, so don't tell anyone. [Laughs] With *Pac-Man*, it looks top-down 2D, but it's actually 3D. But we're looking at different ideas with that as well.

Bill: I keep pushing him to make a 2D *Mario*... [Laughs]

MR: Speaking of 2D, *Treasure* is good at that. How do you think *Wario World* came out, and are you working with them on new ideas?

SM: I like working with *Treasure*, and we're really happy with how *Wario World* turned out. They're a company that's very talented with 2D, so there's always a possibility. 14



NOW

REVIEWS YOU CAN TRUST

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HOW WE RATE

YOUR GUIDE TO THE GMR SCORING SYSTEM

1 WINS OF CRAP 2 WASTED 3 BROKEN 4 MEDIOCRE 5 AVERAGE 6 GOOD STUFF 7 RECOMMENDED 8 EXCELLENT 9 MUST-HAVE 10 TIMELESS CLASSIC

WARNING! WHERE MULTIPLE VERSIONS OF A GAME ARE REVIEWED, GMR WILL MENTION DIFFERENCES ONLY IF THEY SIGNIFICANTLY AFFECT THE GAMEPLAY

At GMR, we eat, sleep, drink, and occasionally secrete games. If we say something is a crap sandwich, then don't eat it. If we award it our prestigious Essential Selection award, then you can take your lunch money and blow it on some effervescent digital gaming hoo-ha. Don't hate. Celebrate.



→ The Berserker and Assassin, who weren't playable in the Japanese version, are selectable in Versus mode in the U.S. SCII. Nice one!



← Each version of the game (Xbox, PS2, GameCube), has a different exclusive character to play as. Xbox owners get to tussle as Todd McFarlane's Spawn, while PS2 players get Tekken's weaponless Heihachi. GameCube owners get it best, however, with the chance to pick up arms as the adult version of Nintendo's favorite elf-boy, Link. No Wind Miller jokes, please. This ain't no cat-shaded bean sprout. He's a man, baby.



SOUL CALIBUR II

THE WORLD'S BEST 3D WERPONS BARWLER RETURNS

TEEN | GAMECUBE | PS2 | XBOX [ALL VERSIONS REVIEWED]

PUBLISHER: NAMCO
DEVELOPER: NAMCO
PRICE: \$49.99
RELEASE: AUGUST 2003
PLAYERS: 1-2
OS: JAPAN

➔ The world claims to love *Soul Calibur*, and while it was a significant hit, especially given the console it was released on (Dreamcast), the truth of the matter is that the game's audience was still, in the grand scheme of things, rather limited. This time around, Namco is making damn sure that everyone gets a crack at taking Teki for a tumble on all three platforms.

Good news for gamers all around, but the big question is, how do you follow up one of the best 3D fighting games of all time? In the case of the highly anticipated

Soul Calibur II, the answer is clearly more, more. Nothing wrong with that!

The series, which started with *Soul Blade* on PlayStation, is now in its third incarnation, and it brings with it all the things that made the first game so great, as well as loads of new features. The original *Soul Calibur* cast returns (in one form or another), and the game adds new characters like Cassandra (Sophitia's sister), Yunsung (this year's Hwang-like), Raphael (fencing specialist), and Talim (the first Filipino tonfa expert ever). Other notable additions to the cast of

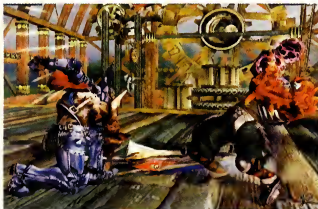
combatants are Charade (SCII's version of the multifaceted Edge Master), Necrid (the game's crudest character designed by Todd McFarlane), and depending on which version of the game you bought, Nintendo's Link, McFarlane's Spawn, or Namco's own Heihachi will also adorn your roster (see sidebar, top). Other characters, like Lizardman, Assassin, and Berserker are available for use in Versus mode, giving gamers a whopping total of 23 different fighters to play as.

Since each duelist has a different fighting style and weapon preference →

XB

PS2

GC



→ Meet Necrid: A prime example of why Japanese developers should steer far away from Western "designers" like Todd McFarlane. Not only is this character scrubbish (a cheap, powerful, fast fighter), but his design is taken straight from the pages of Bad American Comic Book Design 101.



WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

GMR sniffs out the subtle differences between the three different versions.

Kicking butts with the Keebler elf

The control in the **GameCube** version is surprisingly good, with buttons intuitively arranged and response time razor sharp. The **Cube** *Soul Calibur II* is nearly as sharp as the **Xbox** version, and **GameCube** owners get the coolest exclusive character in **Link**.

No weapons? No problem!

Whether you're using analog or digital controls, the **PS2** pad offers the best controls for kicking butts. **Heihachi**, as lame as he might seem (Tidus from *FFX* would have been better), is actually very cool. After all, beating up your friends, unarmed, is great for smack talk. But the graphics are the best polished of the three versions.

Such pretty green eyes

The **Xbox** controller, thanks to the ultrastill D-pad and gummy bear-buttons, is the least responsive controller to play *Soul Calibur II* with. **Spawn** is a surprisingly quick character, but his range is limited, and he's, well, **Spawn**. The graphics are the best of the three versions, though not by much. Loading times are hyperquick. **LE**

GameCube



PlayStation 2



XBOX



[Taki the ninja uses sais, while Nightmare uses a broadsword, etc.], learning your favorite character's strength and weaknesses versus the field of opponents is a deep and enjoyable affair. Unlocking everyone's extra weapons in Weapon Master mode [the extra weapons are a throwback to the *Soul Blade* days] adds even more replay value, due to each weapon's differing attributes.

Besides the extra weapons and massive collection of unlockables tucked within, most major gameplay tweaks and additions [i.e. wall attacks] are subtle, enriching the versatility of combat rather than reinventing it.

The thing that makes *SCII* such an

overall great gaming package is that it's easy to play, yet difficult to master; newbies and veterans alike can co-exist. Nonetheless the energized gameplay [which truly shines in multiplayer] lies a game of sheer polish, style, and finesse. The graphics are beautiful and the sound effects are phenomenal, from the harsh clang of metal-on-metal weapons to the epic orchestral soundtrack.

Of course *SCII* has a downside, namely too many similar characters [was Cassandra really necessary?] and a lack of balance between cheap characters like Necrid and difficult-to-master types like Ivy. Also, once everything has been unlocked in Weapon Master mode,

single-player action quickly stales. The final disappointment is how similar all three console versions are, despite the unique characters each one has. Still, minor gripes all.

Not quite the giant step in innovation that *Soul Calibur* was to *Soul Blade* but still the high-water mark for 3D weapons combat, *Soul Calibur II* is in a class all its own. **LE** **James Melike**



2ND OPINION

Soul Calibur was a favorite among my college cohorts and playing *Soul Calibur II* brings back all the warm and fuzzy memories of days gone by. It's not quite the revolution I was expecting after waiting at these years, but it's still *Soul Calibur* and that's all right by me. **LE** **Andrew Prider**

[RIDIN' THE PS TRAIN]

PlanetSide thankfully offers a few options for those of you who get tired of running for miles in search of a fray. The most basic choice is the Instant Action feature, which will take you straight to wherever a rumble's going on. But since you don't have any control over where you'll end up, using a HART (High Altitude Rapid Transport) shuttle may be a better idea. This vehicle will take you anywhere on the map screen, just be prepared to wait if all the shuttles are taken. Lastly, the warp gates scattered throughout the levels are a fast way to zap yourself from one locale to the next. **B+**



→ Some have said that PlanetSide's graphical style and overall aesthetic is reminiscent of a multiplayer Halo. It's really not. It's got more of a generic sci-fi look, but with more garish colors. The colors make sense from a team perspective (don't want to shoot your own boys), but seem pretty counterintuitive from a camouflage perspective.



PLANETSIDE

YOU COULD PAY MORE. BUT WHY WOULD YOU?

TEEN | PC

PUBLISHER: GIGAWATT
DEVELOPER: GIGAWATT
PRICE: \$39.99
AVAILABLE NOW
1-800-69-3607
OS: PC

➔ Let's just cut to the chase: No, PlanetSide is not worth a monthly \$13 fee. Yeah, it sounds great. There's an expansive sci-fi planet; three factions sporting distinct strengths and weaknesses, all vying for control of the planet; vehicles and weapons galore; and, of course, tons of players going at each other's throats online. The problem is that great ideas often get in the way of what should be top on people's priority list—fun. Spurts of fun erupt here and there on Auraxis, if you're lucky enough to find a squad that sticks around and you've got enough certification points to pump your dude up and wreak some nasty on an unwitting opponent. But

more often than not, you've got one but not the other, so you feel all dressed up with no place to go. In fact, finding a hot zone that doesn't play like a deathmatch in a broom closet (or getting to a hot zone at all) takes more legwork than you'd expect for the payoff. And with "capture-the-base" as the recycled goal every time you log on, you start wondering pretty quickly what else there is to do. At its core, PlanetSide isn't expansive or persistent—it's just the same scenario repeated in different environments with different people. One strong point is a certification points system that unlocks new weapons, armor, and vehicle options; what becomes available depends

on your experience level. And if you're lucky enough to play with a group of buddies—especially with a commander—then the team-based game structure definitely has its moments. But why pay for virtually the same experience every month when a straight-up sci-fi online shooter for 50 bucks would have sufficed. **B-**

—Jeanne Kim Trais

GMR **S/10**
BETTER THAN: ULTIMA ONLINE
NOT AS GOOD AS: TRIBES 2
WAIT FOR IT: STAR WARS GALAXIES

2ND. OPINION

PlanetSide was originally described to me as a Halo-like, which as you might imagine sounds pretty fine in actual practice. It's something altogether different. The game lacks focus and intensity, but PlanetSide's developers have the means to tighten things, and here's hoping they do. **B-**
—James Makin

PC



→ In case you've been blindly favoring the other fighting game series instead of Virtua Fighter, you'll be glad to know that Evolution features two very Tekken-esque fighters in Goh and Brad. These two cutups are great for neck breakin' antics. Hoel



IT'S YOUR BIRTHDAY!

If you've ever wanted to play the original Virtua Fighter in arcade-perfect form but couldn't afford the original quarter-munching unit, now's your chance. Exclusive to the U.S. release of Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution is the Virtua Fighter 10th Anniversary mode, which lets you play with characters and backgrounds in their original style. It's actually better than "arcade perfect," since the mode implements some of Evolution's moves and characters. But you can opt to play against only the characters that were available when the game debuted back in 1993 if you wish. **B+**



VIRTUA FIGHTER 4: EVOLUTION

THE FIGHT OF YOUR LIFE

TEEN | PS2

➔ Evolution indeed. In the 10 years since 3D fighting games were created, the Virtua Fighter series has always been the high-water mark for both depth and innovation. But for the grace of Virtua Fighter do games like Tekken even exist. And now, VF4: Evolution is here, and it is not only the best 3D fighter of all time, it will make you a better fighting-game player.

While most fighting games feature the stock-standard Arcade, Versus, Training, Survival, and Time Attack modes (as Evolution does), no fighting game has ever really managed to elevate the single-player experience beyond fighting a preset number of characters in a certain order. Evolution shatters that

cliché. In its phenomenally absorbing Quest mode, Evolution takes you through an intimidating number of cities, wherein you meet and compete against hundreds of that city's best players. Each arcade within each city also has a specific number of alternate mission objectives (such as knocking your foe against a wall with a striking attack). For every mission accomplished and city conquered, you earn items to customize your character with and money to buy items. Every so often you enter a ranking match, which, if won, raises your level and notoriety.

Of course, multiplayer action is just as awesome and, for newbies, the extensive Training mode is not only good

fun, it's comprehensive beyond belief. Evolution's stat engine lets you analyze your tendencies and improve your techniques.

The only glitch in this dynamic, beautiful game is a funky memory-save system. Despite that, Evolution is less a videogame and more a virtual dojo where forging your own fighter's reputation is not only an option, but an endlessly addictive obligation. **A-** James Mielke

GMR 10/10

BETTER THAN TENKEN 4
WOULD MAKE BRUCE LEE PROUD
WAIT FOR IT: DEAD OR ALIVE ONLINE

2ND. OPINION

It took Virtua Fighter 4 to finally seal me on these here newfangled 3D brawlers. This extension of that game's greatness is deeper, wider, and a mere \$50. Evolution. It might not make you a better human being, but rest assured you're going to learn a thing or two about fighting games—for cheap! **B+** David Chen

PUBLISHER: SEGA
DEVELOPER: AM2
PRICE: \$39.99
RELEASED: AUGUST 2002
PLATFORM: PS2
COUNTRY: JAPAN

REVIEWS YOU CAN TRUST

the sims superstar → grand theft auto vice city → sx superstar → rent-a-hero no.1

THE SIMS: SUPERSTAR ROCK 'N' ROLL-PLAYING

EVERYONE | PC

➔ Enough already! EA continues to milk *The Sims* by releasing an endless stream of expansion packs. *The Sims: Superstar* is the latest; this time, your sim has a shot at stardom.

For \$29.99, you get more items and a music and movie studio complex. By playing through some tedious and unchallenging minigames, you earn money and your star power increases. Playing out your career is fun for a little while, but there's just too much tedium and repetition involved to inject freshness into a tired franchise. And if you don't have the chops to make it as a real rocker, there's always a future on the reality TV circuit. **D- Di Luo**



FOR: ELECTRONICS ARTS PRICE: \$29.99
DEV: MAGES PLATFORMS: PC
REL: AVAILABLE NOW GENRES: U.S.A.

GMR 6¹⁰

BETTER THAN: THE SIMS: VACATION
NOT AS GOOD AS: THE SIMS: UNLEASHED
WAIT FOR IT: THE SIMS 2

GTA: VICE CITY MOUSELOOK MAYHEM

MATURE | PC

➔ What is there to say about *Vice City* that hasn't already been said? It's the greatest next-gen game ever (to date), and the PS2 version has stolen quite a kajillion copies.

Now, PC gamers get their turn, just like they did with the port of *GTA3*. The open-ended and uproariously funny game remains the same, but with higher-res graphics, the ability to play your own MP3s, and mouselook, which makes controlling Tommy when he's on foot much easier. Controlling the vehicles however (especially airborne ones) is a lot more difficult, so plugging in a joystick is highly recommended for those missions. **B+ Tom Price**



FOR: ROCKSTAR PRICE: \$29.99
DEV: ROCKSTAR GAMES PLATFORMS: PC
REL: JUNE 2002 GENRES: U.S.A.

GMR 10¹⁰

BETTER THAN: GTA 3 PC
NOT AS GOOD AS: VICE CITY ON PS2
WAIT FOR IT: THE NEXT GTA PC PORT

SX SUPERSTAR NO CLAIM TO FAME

TEEN | XBOX (REVIEWED) | CC

➔ You can become a celebrity in *SX Superstar*, winning all sorts of motorcycle races, taking home fat endorsement checks after your rider whoroes out ad space on his body, collecting hot girlfriends, and moving into swanky domiciles. But, in the interest of truth in advertising, it's necessary to quote journalist A.J. Benza, who once quipped, "Fame. Ain't it a bitch?" Spartan in its design and curiously devoid of such necessities as customizable bikes or the option to change the controller configurations, *Superstar* can barely keep pace with the middle of the pack. **C- Greg Orlando**



FOR: MAX GILLIAN PRICE: \$29.99
DEV: GUNX PLATFORMS: XBOX
REL: AVAILABLE NOW GENRES: U.S.A.

GMR 5¹⁰

BETTER THAN: TONY GRIND
NOT AS GOOD AS: MOTU GSP
WAIT FOR IT: REAL STARWORLD



RENT-A-HERO NO.1 STRONG ENOUGH TO BE THE HERO?

TEEN | XBOX

➔ Now here's an example of a game that should've stayed in Japan. Originally released on the Japanese Genesis and later remade on Dreamcast, *Rent-A-Hero No. 1* was wisely passed on by Sega of America both times. AIA has decided to release it in the States, possibly to cash in on the new open-ended-and-mission-based-like-*Grand Theft Auto* genre whose games appear to be swelling the shelves.

Like the bastard child of *GTA* and *www.english.com*, *Rent-A-Hero No. 1* botches an otherwise clever premise with what the press release describes as "super stupid excellent" gameplay: two out of three isn't bad, right? As a poofy-haired teen from a...er, unique suburban family, you transform into a hero with the aid of a power suit—the only catch is it's a rental, and you'll need to earn money to keep using it. And so the main thrust of the game equates to "get a job." Along the way, you'll do lots of silly errands and fight tons of thugs with a techniqueless combo system (where you repeatedly mash a single button to make different moves come

out). "Hilarious" puns abound, such as the humorous "Sim n' Ella Burger" fast-food chain and your "Creamcast" game console. Oh yes, you will certainly giggle right through the game's many load times.

Rent-A-Hero No. 1 was hugely when it came out on Dreamcast, and it's even funnier now. Everything about this game is low-rent, and nothing has improved in the Xbox port. The game even uses the D-pad for its 3D movement and features one of the worst cameras seen in a game yet.

Rent-A-Hero No. 1 was poised to fall into the same fun, quirky category of niche Japanese games like *Incredible Crisis* and *Seaman*. As it is, it's less *Seaman* and more *Diet Shennmue*. **C- Michael Vreeland**

FOR: AIA GAMES PRICE: \$49.99
DEV: AIA GAMES PLATFORMS: XBOX
REL: JULY 2003 GENRES: JAPAN

GMR 4¹⁰

BETTER THAN: B. JONES CROCIERES
NOT AS GOOD AS: DRAGON THEFT AUTO III
YOU COULD ALWAYS BE A RENT-A-COP





→ Nothing makes a girl feel grittier during a grimy horror-adventure than wearing some fancy duds. What better way to kill some time (and some freaky monsters) than by wearing a sweet-ass GMR shirt? Check this issue's A.I. section to find out how to unlock the shirt that all the "B" kids are wearing.

SILENT HILL 3

SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES...BACK

MATURE | PS2

Games don't come much darker than this, in both the figurative and literal sense. Set in one of the bleakest, most hopeless, soul-destroying settings ever conceived for a videogame, it's time to ask the question: Are *Silent Hill* games actually fun?

The quality is undeniable, for sure. Featuring the best graphics of any PS2 game yet, *Silent Hill 3* is, at times, almost excruciatingly frightening to play through. With malevolent creatures lurking just out of sight at any given corner and with a deliberately uncooperative camera, you really never know what's coming. Playing on people's fear of the unknown is used to great effect in *Fatal Frame*, but in the case of *SH3*, this basic tenet is set for

maximum impact. The game, despite the helpful mapping system, is superlinear. Maneuvering through each area usually consists of running down a dark, unlit hallway (Heather uses one of the most ineffective flashlights in the history of flashlights) and trying every door until one of them opens. An open door merely signifies that the items within are up for the grabbing, and away you go. It limits exploration but creates a tense, claustrophobic atmosphere that more action-oriented games like *Resident Evil* fail to muster.

Combat is weak as usual, and for the most part, is actually best avoided when possible. Since there is no reward for actually defeating enemies, ammo and

supplies are better saved for boss battles. The game's biggest weakness is its lack of any levity or humor to counterpoint the story's overwhelmingly serious tone.

Ultimately, it's the well-directed story and its stunning conclusion that provides the much-needed payoff and motivation to finish the game. With a slew of secrets designed to encourage repeat visits, *SH3* may not be "fun," but it certainly is compelling. **B+** James Mielke

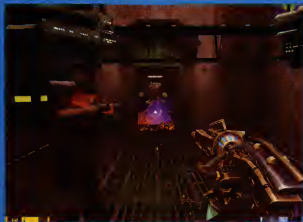
GMR 8¹⁰

BETTER THAN ALONE IN THE DARK: TNN NOT AS GOOD AS *RESIDENT EVIL* (GAMECUBE) HUNT IT FOR IT: *FATAL FRAME 2*

2ND. OPINION

First things first: This is a *Silent Hill* game. So, expect full-on monsterfests, long stretches of silence, claustrophobic camerawork, and a decorating scheme ripped straight out of David Fincher's bathroom (more bad trip than adventure). It's a *Silent Hill* story through and through, and still the best at what it does: trying your freakin' nerves. **B+** Jason Chen

PUBLISHER: KONAMI
DEVELOPER: KCE
PROG: SH-PT
RELEASE: AUGUST 2002
PLAYERS: 1
CROSS: JAPAN



STAR TREK: ELITE FORCE II

SET PHASERS TO WHUP-ASS

TEEN | PC

➔ The biggest complaint about *Star Trek: Elite Force II*—its most insipid quality, if you will—is that it makes you actually want to like *Star Trek*. Sorry if that offends you, Trekkies, but most people (like this reviewer) think *Trek* was dumb to begin with, mostly because situations were always worked out with bits of cleverness and strategy. Screw that “set phasers to stun” crap—we want to see aliens getting f-ed up by big honking guns. That’s exactly what *Elite Force II* gives us, and with surprising aplomb.

Elite Force II picks up where the finale of the Voyager television series left off: with the ship trapped inside a Borg cube that’s headed toward Earth. As in the first game, you play the leader of the Hazard Team, an elite unit of commandos who handle security and off-ship operations—in essence, a bunch of heavily armed badass redshirts.

As in the first game, the action here is furious, with lots of guns and fun toys to play with. But *Elite Force II*’s single-player campaign doesn’t last

very long. Playing time in *Elite Force II* is probably double that of its predecessor, although some extensive boring stretches set on the ship inflate that figure somewhat. Still, the actual action is a load of fun and is mixed with some clever little puzzle bits. But for a first-person-shooter, it can be a little conventional at times.

Elite Force II will really show off your videocard, provided you have a decent one. Any PC of semirecent vintage should be able to run it smoothly with most stuff turned on. Just make sure you tell people you didn’t realize it was a *Trek* game, considering how cool it looks and fun it is to play. **A-** *Tom Price*

PC: ACTIVISION
DEV: NIS
PC: AVAILABLE NOW

PRICE: \$19.99
PLAYERS: 1-4
OS: WINDOWS 95/98

GMR ELITE **8**¹⁰

BETTER THAN: ELITE FORCE
NOT AS GOOD AS: HALF-LIFE
WAIT FOR IT: DOOM III



INDIANA JONES & THE EMPEROR'S TOMB

WHIP IT GOOD

TEEN | PS2 (REVIEWED) | X3

➔ All the way back in *GMR 03*, we reviewed the Xbox version of *Emperor's Tomb*. Why the PS2 version took so long to come out, we can't really say, but despite the few graphical drawbacks one might expect from an Xbox-to-PS2 port, it's still the same fun adventure. The textures aren't quite as sharp and the framerate is a little dodgy, but Indy controls slightly better on the PS2 controller, thanks to the additional shoulder buttons. If you have the option, pick up the Xbox version, but if you don't, the PS2 version is fine. Don't worry about missing out on anything too significant. No matter what system it's on, it's pure Indiana Jones. **A-** *Andrew Pfister*



PC: EIDOS
DEV: EIDOS
PC: AVAILABLE NOW

PRICE: \$49.99
PLAYERS: 1-4
OS: WINDOWS 95/98

GMR WHIP **7**¹⁰

BETTER THAN: TOMB RAIDER ADD
NOT AS GOOD AS: RTO
WAIT FOR IT: TAK & THE POWER OF JUJU

SUMMER BEACH VOLLEYBALL

TURN ON THE A/C

TEEN | PS2

➔ PS2 finally receives a collection of saucy virtual women who jump and bounce under the flimsy pretense of beach volleyball. Alas, these ladies are hamstrung by weak animation, dinner-theater accents, and brain-dead A.I., and you can't appreciate their asses—uh, assets through the long-range camera or motion-blurred replays. *Summer Heat* also includes reams of unnecessary stats and a cheesy commentator, neither of which enhances the spike-dominated rallies and onscreen arrows that surgically remove strategy by showing where each shot is headed. Ogiing has never been so tedious. **D-** *Zach Meston*



PC: NIS
DEV: NIS
PC: AVAILABLE NOW

PRICE: \$19.99
PLAYERS: 1-4
OS: WINDOWS 95/98

GMR WHIP **4**¹⁰

BETTER THAN: SKIN GANCER
NOT AS GOOD AS: DOOMAY
WAIT FOR IT: OUTLAW VOLLEYBALL

THE ITALIAN JOB: L.A. HEIST

OUT OF GRS

TEEN | XBOX (REVIEWED) | PS2 | PC

➔ *The Italian Job: L.A. Heist* is the game tie-in to the recent movie starring Marky Mark, which is itself a remake of the classic 1969 comic caper starring Michael Caine and Benny Hill. If you haven't seen the new movie and have no idea what it's about, the content of the game would suggest a story about a near-future Los Angeles where humans have been completely replaced by Mini Coopers doomed to carry out menial errands around the city. It's really nothing more than a crappy checkpoint racer with the licenses of one flop movie and one underpowered car painted on as thinly as gold leaf. **D-** *Tom Price*



PC: EIDOS
DEV: CLIMAX
PC: AVAILABLE NOW

PRICE: \$49.99
PLAYERS: 1-4
OS: WINDOWS 95/98

GMR MINI **3**¹⁰

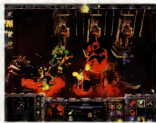
BETTER THAN: POLE POSITION
NOT AS GOOD AS: MIDNIGHT CLUB II
WAIT FOR IT: NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND

XB

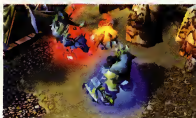
PC

PS2

GC



→ Even in the serious, story-driven campaign, there are humorous touches. Check out the tiny panda head on Kadan Stormrage's weapon. The return of the funny is only one of *The Frozen Throne*'s excellent additions.



WARCRAFT III: THE FROZEN THRONE

THE ONCE AND FUTURE KING OF RESOURCE MANAGEMENT RETURNS

TEEN | PC

PUBLISHER: BLIZZARD
DEVELOPER: BLIZZARD
PRICE: \$59.99
RELEASED: 1999
PLAYERS: 1-12 ONLINE
OS: Windows 95/98/NT

➔ **WarCraft III's** single flaw is its stilted, serious single-player campaign. Previous Blizzard games are marked by a goofy good-naturedness; *WarCraft III's* humorous campaign is both anomalous and fairly repetitive. Good news: *The Frozen Throne* is not only occasionally funny, but also creative. The four single-player campaigns are constantly inventive, featuring unique goals and mission structures. There are Capture the Flag missions. There are splitscreen missions in which you must simultaneously perform several tasks. There are hilariously frantic secret missions. Even the standard build-and-sweep missions usually have some

additional goal to offset the standard formula. Best of all, the bonus orc campaign is more *Diablo* than *WarCraft*.

The single-player game isn't the only great thing about this expansion. Most of the additions are available in multiplayer, so you get most of the new units—including the night elves' mountain giant, the humans' airborne dragon riders, and the orc's bat rider—to use in Battle.net and skirmish matches, as well as two new units and a new hero type for each race. You can also hire heroes, who represent new races that will assist you in the single-player game, such as the water-dwelling Naga, the Pandaren Brewmaster, and the Draenei, who look

like aged Domo-kuns.

With *Diablo II: Lord of Destruction* and *StarCraft: Brood War*, Blizzard showed that an expansion can be more than just a bunch of new units and tilesets. The *Frozen Throne* raises that bar even higher by bringing both the gameplay and the funny. There's so much new content, it's more like an excellent sequel to the original. **B+** Ron Dulin

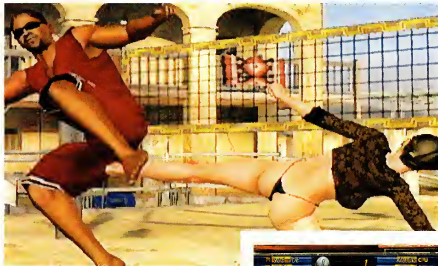
GMR

BETTER THAN WARCRAFT II
NOT AS GOOD AS TOTAL ANNIHILATION
WAIT IT FOR THE WORLD OF WARCRAFT

BETTER THAN EZRA
9/10

2ND. OPINION

I'm big on Blizzard games in general (still playing *Overlord*), but *WarCraft* II really didn't do it for me. The camera was too drawn in and it wasn't as hilarious as *Blizzard* games usually are. While the camera in *Frozen Throne* isn't any better, the funny is back, and so am I. **B+** James Makie



→ If you feel Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball gives you plenty of ta-tas, but less actual volleyball action, then Outlaw Volleyball should surely give you what you're looking for. Of course, if you just want to straddle some dude's face, well, that's OK, too.



OUTLAW VOLLEYBALL

SAND IN THE U-ASS-ELINE

MATURE | XBOX

➔ For those who found DDA: Xtreme Beach Volleyball rich in women but lacking in gameplay, Outlaw Volleyball comes as a welcome replacement, since it focuses on the sport rather than swapping swimsuits. Character selection includes a boozey, toothless redneck; a Bruce Lee/Elvis impersonator; a Russian femme fatale who pulls a pistol to dispute line calls; and a blonde bombshell who is clearly intended to challenge Lara Croft for the crown of hottest game babe ever.

What's surprising about Outlaw Volleyball is that it plays as well as it looks, like NBA Jam on the beach. Players can use a turbo meter for speed bursts, additional power, and

gravity-defying spikes and serves. Characters are upgraded by engaging in off-the-wall drills that were clearly inspired by Sega's Virtua Tennis series, like spiking a group of obsessed fans who storm the net, Space Invaders fashion.

Control is tighter than most of the swimsuits the women wear, though it requires practice. Players frustrated with their friends or the CPU can duck under the net and kick the crap out of their opponents to steal turbo regeneration power, but the fighting minigame is clearly just for laughs.

Our only gripe is that the CPU occasionally performs impossible digs when its players should get a face full of sand. Still, with four-

player support and competition available on Xbox Live, Outlaw Volleyball is reason enough to stay inside on a hot summer day. This isn't a game for children, however. With its sexual references, tan lines, and gyrating asses, Outlaw Volleyball makes DDA look like McDonald's Playland. **B+**

—Doug Trueman

TV-14	SDMA & SENSITIVE	PRICE	\$49.99
ESR	WPNMEX	PLAYERS	1-4
REL.	JULY 2002	DEVELOPER	U.S.A.

GMR 8¹⁰ JUST BEACHY
BETTER THAN: SUMMER HEAT BEACH
NOT AS GOOD AS: BEACH SPIRITS
WAIT FOR IT: DOXIBY 2

**STEPPING
OUT OF
THESE
PAGES AND
INTO YOUR
HOMES!**



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**Big Video Game
HUNTING**

**ON
HeadlineNews**

HOTWIRED's
Big Video Game Hunting
hosted by Erica Hill
on CNN Headline News.



ARE YOU READY FOR SOME FOOTBALL?!?

IT'S A YES OR NO QUESTION...

It's that time again. You're not here to cosplay and dress up like *Final Fantasy X*'s Tidus 'n' Yuna. You're ready to eat red meat, strap on some pads, and sit your butt down in front of the tube to play your favorite football games. Oh, but what to play, what to play. Well, what do we have here? Football reviews! What a coincidence.

MADDEN 2004 ACT LIKE A PROFESSIONAL

EVERYONE | PS2 (REVIEWED) | GC | XB | PC | GBA | PHONE

➔ It's significant that radically divisive language is often used when describing Madden. You'll hear passionate football gamers talk about how Madden pretends to be hardcore, suffers from rehash syndrome, and generally lags behind in innovation. Then you'll hear, "But it's the greatest f***** football game ever created."

Madden's long-running history is both burden and buoy, as a product doesn't get this polished without continuing to improve on what's right. 04 offers more of the same, but also takes encouraging steps toward true innovation.

EA's vaunted Playmaker feature gives you the ability, on offense and defense, to interact with or change the game's A.I. on the fly. Need a DB to drop a bit deeper

during a pass play? Want to get that putting guard to swing upfield? That's what Playmaker allows for, and it's a perfect implementation of an easy, fun, and rewarding feature.

Owner's mode checks in as the other major improvement here. Now, users are given free reign over everything from the price of concessions (cheaper beer!) to the pursuit of building a new stadium.

Online play is refined thanks to EA's new messenger system, which lets you chat in lobbies and look for buddies online. In-game voice chat is a hoot, as long as you stay in your age group.

Other titles may impress this fall, but anyone who tackles Madden should come out grinnin'. It's superb in every regard.

1C Dan Leahy



PS2 GC
REV. 10/03
REV. 10/03

PRICE \$49.99
PLAYERS 1-8
SACK 9th

BETTER THAN ALL THE REST
NOT AS GOOD AS: MEETING RAY LEWIS
WAIT FOR IT: NFL STREET

NCAA 2004 THE KIDS ARE ALL RIGHT

EVERYONE | PS2 (REVIEWED) | GC | XB

➔ Going on three years now, any fellow gamer unlucky enough to be around me after a few beers got to hear my rant about how NCAA is actually the best football game on the market. In a sober state, however, logic and clarity had me firmly on Madden's side.

Well, I'm here to tell you that sober, rational thoughts aren't always right. NCAA stands as (at least) Madden's equal and easily justifies a \$50 expenditure.

All the great stuff from past years is here: There are tons of college teams [even more this year], rivalries, classic games, boisterous crowds, a Dynasty mode, and so on. More important, however, are the subtle gameplay changes that make NCAA stand apart.

NCAA now features "impact" blocks,

which can occur near the line of scrimmage or as your wide receiver escorts you into the end zone 50 yards downfield. It's a great addition in terms of realism and one of the more impressive visual feats in the game.

On the defensive side, NCAA turns heads (literally) with its "line of sight" logic. Players whose heads are turned to see the play react properly. Players running backwards or looking at their man won't magically snap around to track something they didn't see. It sounds basic, but NCAA is one of the first games to get this dynamic right.

It's easy to see where I'm going with this. Improvements galore and online play [with chat] make NCAA second to none.

1C Dan Leahy



PS2 GC
REV. 10/03
REV. 10/03

PRICE \$49.99
PLAYERS 1-8
SACK 9th

BETTER THAN: NCAA 2003
NOT AS GOOD AS: A FULL SCHOLARSHIP
WAIT FOR IT: MADDEN 2004



4- The hits are big and the defense tough in ESPN NFL Football. If you're brave enough to rely primarily on a passing game—like say, oh, the Raiders—expect to get picked off like flies near a bug zapper. Mixing up your attacks to spread the opposing team's defense, this is key here. Plus, ESPN supports Xbox Live, whereas Madden does not.

[FIRST PERSON FOOTBALL]

➔ We hear your skepticism, but trust us—ESPN Football's First Person mode is actually quite fun to play. It's not perfect, but this unique experience looks good and provides a promising diversion from traditional play.

The lack of peripheral vision [you can only see in a 70-degree cone] means that some elements, like the passing game and secondary coverage, are more challenging. But it's also more realistic. Dropping back five steps, identifying the pass coverage and blitzes, and then delivering a strike to a receiver you can't even see is no easy task, but it provides one heck of a rush. Ask any NFL quarterback.

Here's hoping Sega keeps First Person mode in future versions. The notion of an 11-on-11 first-person game makes us feverish with future anticipation. **1C**



➔ "GRAB THAT S****" you might holler as you attempt to reel in the rocket your QB just launched at you. ESPN's First Person mode is yet another innovation the trend-setting team at Visual Concepts has produced. Bet on Madden to try and implement something similar next year.

ESPN NFL FOOTBALL SEGA'S STILL IN THE GAME

EVERYONE | XBOX (REVIEWED) | PS2

➔ Until the release of **ESPN NFL Football**, elegant and tables and professional football lived in separate realms. But thanks to *The Grid*, one of several new features in Sega's latest football title, fashion-forward football fans can follow their on-field exploits with an interior-design chaser.

Formerly known as the critically acclaimed NFL 2K series, Sega's partnership with ESPN goes further toward incorporating television-style presentation and production values than any other game on the market. Chris Berman's pre- and post-game delivery is vintage Boomer, and ESPN's graphical overlays for replays, stats, and player profiles look sharp.

Unfortunately, on the field, Sega falls short of the more immediate action, tighter controls, and more powerful on-field flexibility of Madden 2004. 2K3 fans familiar with Sega's more realistic take on football might disagree, but this feels slow, flat, and less exciting in comparison.

It's not that *ESPN Football* is subpar. On the contrary—this year's game is better than ever, with a strong Franchise mode, an efficient play-calling interface, a cool First Person mode (I, and *The Grid*. Designing and decorating your own plush pad is more intriguing than it sounds. As you accomplish certain feats, the game places collectible objects in your crib.

But the action doesn't feel quite right.

Players' animations, while smooth, feel floaty and imprecise—sometimes, it even looks like they're gliding. This makes the passing game particularly frustrating, not being able to see a receiver's final cut on a fly route can mean the difference between a TD and an incompleteness...or worse. On the plus side, the new power-up turbo option allows players to execute special jukes by holding down the Turbo button instead of tapping it.

ESPN Pro Football lives under a massive shadow, but the First Person mode, the solid gameplay, and the other new extras make it a worthwhile purchase for gamers intimidated by Madden...or those just looking for a different experience. **1C** *George Jones*



PLAY: SEGA OF AMERICA
DEV: VISUAL CONCEPTS
PCT: SEPTEMBER 2003

PRICE: \$49.97
PLAYERS: 1-16 (PS2, 1-4 ONLINE)
RATING: E.S.A.

GMR THE **8th**

BETTER THAN NFL 2K3
NOT AS GOOD AS MADDEN 2004
WORTH FOR IT: NFL BLITZ

XB

PS2



TOMB RAIDER: ANGEL OF DARKNESS

A TOTAL ECLIPSE OF THE ART

TEEN | PS2 [REVIEWED] | PC

PUBLISHER: EIDOS
DEVELOPER: CORE
PRICE: \$49.99
RELEASED: MAY 19
PLATFORMS: PC
RATING: M

➔ Befitting a venerable videogame franchise with big-budget movie ties and a massive built-in audience, **Lara Croft's latest outing benefits from slick staging; a sleek interface, stirring string music, and a compelling—if not gripping—CG intro. This luster, one learns, rarely goes beyond skin deep, and it's riddled with holes. Fans, fear not: Lady Lara is as tar heeled, top heavy, and tedious to manage as ever.**

The *Angel of Darkness* finds Lara fleeing across the rain-spattered rooftops of Paris in the middle of the night; someone's butchered one of her peers, and she's now the prime suspect. There's no fortune and glory at stake on this quest—this time, it's personal. And as

Eidos' latest slew of advertising is eager to inform you, this is a shadier, more sinister (and sellable) episode in the life of Ms. Croft. Dodging France's finest has left Lara unusually cold-blooded and less droll than we recall: Once exemplary of the sexiest sort of stiff-lipped Brit, she is now, quite simply, a bitch.

Then again, this is the point, one that's driven in via a series of crudely crafted branching conversation trees, one of a few new (flimsily wrought) features, including pawning sports watches and LPs for Euros and very slowly rooting through someone's kitchen drawers in search of, say, a spare ammo clip. Even more awkward is the vaunted power-up system, which requires impromptu

bodybuilding in order to access new areas. It's flawed in both practice and rationale (anytime the extra ounce of strength is actually crucial, the solution is right at hand), and reeks of lofty plans left unfinished. Not surprisingly, new playable character Kurtis Trent doesn't need to build up his stats—he's quite fit as it is, thank you, ma'am. Of course that leaves less backtracking for the player, so maybe his manliness is a bit of a boon.

Controlling Lara is like a dream—that one where you simply can't get to where you want to go fast enough, no matter how hard you try. Those who've played any of a number of recent entries in any number of game genres will find Lara's new action set suspect, arbitrary, and

2ND. OPINION

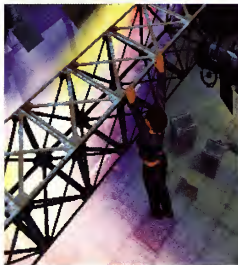
Reassrigh Controlling Lara is like playing ice hockey in a 1950s Buick with a flat tire and a potato where the steering wheel should be. Find that's being generous. Between this and the truly evil spewer that is the camera, *Angel of Darkness* confirms what many have suspected for years: Core Design are no bloody good. [@Simon_Cox](#)

REVIEWS YOU CAN TRUST

tomb raider: angel of darkness → pirates of the caribbean



→ Much hullabaloo has been made regarding the introduction of new playable character Kurtis Trent. Not only is he tough, scruffy-looking, and a fan of big blairs, but he also possesses some pretty impressive psychic skills (of which the player is privy to none), such as include the ability to wield the Chingal, a blessed object d'art, with deadly hands-free precision. All that and he gets to share a high-stakes, slow motion, entirely unerotically charged "moment" with Ms. Croft.



occasionally contradictory: She can't stealthily tiptoe while carrying a gun, nor can she stealthily snap some fellow's neck while standing upright. Turning 90 degrees remains teeth-gnashing tedious, and we're willing to bet that Ms. Croft is one of the few polygonal adventurers out there who still can't jump onto a ladder. It all hammers home one very important point: Lara may be easier on the eyes than ever, but she's still a pain in the ass when it comes to telling her what to do.

That's not the whole of this *Angel's* flaws, though. The levels are suitably grandiose and handsomely crafted, but—as with the power-up system—they feel rushed, and poorly synched with



gameplay goals. The joy's been sucked out of exploration, and what remains finds the player trekking back and forth and sniffing for clues with little in the way of direction, explanation, or rationale. Often, death is instantaneous and unavoidable, based more on trial and error (and frequent trips to the Save screen) than sensibility...or even skill.

As with many of the latest slew of licensed, spin-off, and otherwise compromised-for-the-mainstream games, the learning curve here is pretty shallow, making completion a matter of how much you can take rather than how much you can handle. And depending on where your personal interests lay, you might be willing to put up with quite a

bit. Such as wading your way, Sisyphus-like, towards the conclusion—in spite of claustrophobic camerawork, phantom polygons, misused sound effects, and punctuation-free subtitles—on the misguided belief that with big games come big payoffs. Purists will say that this is all part of the venerable series' charm; we say that's irrelevant. This is what you get for your \$50, and it ain't that good. **B-** *David Chen*

GMR OVER-RAIDED 4¹⁰

BETTER THAN: FORTAL RUNNER
AS TERRIBLE AS: RETAIL-LIFE ARCHAEODOLY
WAIT FOR IT: TOMB RAIDER: THE CRADLE OF LIFE

X NOW



PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN YO HO HO...

TEEN | XB [REVIEWED] | PC

→ *Pirates of the Caribbean* isn't just another crappy movie-licensed game. Maybe that's because it started life as another game (*Sea Dogs 2*) and later had the movie license slapped over it. And maybe it's because of these more legitimate beginnings that the game feels like a pretty solid open-ended-style RPG (à la *Morrowind*). But it's almost definitely because of the movie tie-in that the game feels rushed and incomplete. That's a shame, because *Pirates* fans will have a lot of fun running around towns, trading cargo and talking to random scallawags. The rest of us will be rather bored, except for the naval battle sections that are a blast, especially when boarding other ships. The water effects and weather all look really sweet, too. We'd feel good about recommending this game to RPG fans if not for the sluttish framers. Still, *Pirates of the Caribbean* is one of the better movie-licensed games to come out in quite a while. **B+**

—Tom Price



FOR: PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: THE CURSE OF THE BLACK PEARL
DEV: GIGAWATT GAMES
PUB: GIGAWATT GAMES
BOX: \$49.99
ONLINE: \$5.99

GMR LOOTABLE 6¹⁰

BETTER THAN: THE RIDE 4 DISNEYLAND
NOT AS GOOD AS: THE LEGEND OF BILLY KID
WAIT (A LONG TIME) FOR IT: GALLERON

XB

PC

PS2

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS: SHADOWS OF UNDRENTIDE

DRESS-UP HAS NEVER BEEN SO FUN

TEEN | PC

➔ More than a mere expansion pack, BioWare has conjured up something substantial with *Neverwinter Nights: Shadows of Undrentide*. Think more classes, more weapons, and, best of all, more dress-up time with your henchmen. But to get the most out of this game, start the expansion pack with a brand-new character. We imported a high-level cleric—Beaverskull Bablicious—from *NWN* and found *Undrentide* to be too easy.

SOU takes place as a separate story line running concurrently to *NWN*. It starts you off as a student whose teacher (and town) has come under attack. *SOU*'s action is tight and focused, with concentrated exploring, but also with more options that affect alliances

throughout battles, so really explore the dialogue trees with everyone and everything you meet. Your quest to find the evil behind the siege opens up *SOU*'s new prestige classes, including the one our cleric was working toward: the devilish Blackguard.

Along the way, you'll hear something you won't expect: laughter. It's obvious BioWare had a lot of fun writing *SOU*, as evidenced by all the rollicking dialogues and scenarios you find yourself in. But the best feature is playing Barbie with your henchmen. Gone are the days of asking your henchmen to level up, now, you can outfit him with armor and items, levelling them up to your tastes.

This expansion has more going for it than most full games. **B+** Jason Babler



GMR
ESSENTIAL
SELECTION

FOR ADAM
DEV. BIOWARE
VEL. ANDREAS NEON
PRICE: \$29.99
PLAYERS: 1-4
OS: PC
RATING: ESRB

GMR 9/10
NICE LIFE

NOT AS GOOD AS: DUNGEON SIEGE
BETTER THAN: BALDUR'S GATE II
ALWAYS WE'RE: ORIGINAL NEVERWINTER NIGHTS



RTX RED ROCK NOT PAST PRIME

TEEN | PS2

➔ In the latest title from LucasArts, players control E.Z. Wheeler, a space cowboy with a gun for an arm, a cybernetic eye with multiple scan modes, and a collection of doohickies—including a grappling beam—that let him explore a vast world. If you're reminded of one Samus Aran, we're not surprised. To put it bluntly: *RTX Red Rock* is a *Metroid Prime* wannabe that fails on almost every level.

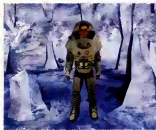
The game begins with a story about purging Mars of aliens called L.E.D.s, but quickly becomes buried in a maze of repeated textures, uninspired graphics, weak sound effects, soulless gunplay, and a frame rate jerkier than a shuttle liftoff.

Because the player can see four different "spectrums," the developers apparently decided to make certain enemies virtually invisible if the right eyepiece is not equipped. This leads to aggravating and spontaneous deaths. But there is life on Mars. Scattered through the game are humans who apparently have nothing better to do but stand like statues, waiting to be rescued. The only

bright spot in the game is Wheeler's interaction with I.R.I.S., an A.I. construct—essentially Cortana from *Halo* but from a 1950s New York diner—that players use to obtain maps, hints, and operate vehicles and machinery.

RTX Red Rock plays like a three-dimensional version of *Midway*'s arcade classic *Xenophobe* in the sense that it's set in a contemporary space world—one that's cramped and fragile—instead of sprawling and vast. Unfortunately, this turns what should be a fun, spaghetti-western style space shoot-'em-up into a race for an open airlock door.

D- Doug Trueman



FOR LUCAARTS
DEV. LUCAARTS
VEL. ANDREAS NEON
PRICE: \$49.99
PLAYERS: 1
OS: PC
RATING: ESRB

GMR 4/10
ROCKY

BETTER THAN: XENOPHOBE, PROJECT SHAWN
NOT NEARLY AS GOOD AS: METROID PRIME
WAIT FOR IT: STARCRAFT II

FINDING NEMO
UNDER THE SEA

EVERYONE | XBOX (REVIEWED) | PC | PS2

➔ When you beat out *The Matrix Reloaded* for total box office receipts, you know you've got a hot property. Pixar's *Finding Nemo* proved to be quite the summertime delight for moviegoers, and its corresponding videogame cash-in is noticeably better than previous Disney film-to-game transfers. The visuals aren't as impressive as the movies, but the underwater aesthetic and various effects (currents, bubbles, steam) are pleasing to the eye. Gameplay consists mostly of basic sidescrolling and swim-through-hoops racing, but as with most Disney games, fans of the film will appreciate it more. **E** *—Andrew Pfister*



FROM DISNEY INTERACTIVE	PRICE	\$29.99
NEW TRAVELER TALKS	PLAYERS	1
NEW AVAILABLE NOW	OS/EN	U.S.

GMR 6/10

BETTER THAN DISNEY'S TARZAN
NOT AS GOOD AS DISNEY KING OF THE BEASTS
WAIT FOR IT: THE INCREDIBLES (THE MOVIE)

ALIENS VS. PREDATOR
WE'RE ALL ALIENS...ON THE INSIDE

TEEN | XBOX (REVIEWED) | PS2

➔ The grass is greener on the other side, but getting there is a bitch. *Aliens Vs. Predator: Extinction* pits humans against aliens against predators—none of whom will be able to move from A to B without first detouring to C, D, and E—in a fine but flawed real-time strategy game based on two film universes.

Players pick a race in one of three multimission campaigns, and *Extinction* does a fine job of balancing its participants. Humans can access powerful weapons and upgrades to make up for their lack of physical strength, predators use cloaking technology to sneak up on foes, and aliens can kill and

impregnate different hosts to create all kinds of units. With the sides properly equalized, management of resources and strategy quite rightly dominates.

Extinction stumbles over some important ground, though, marring what would otherwise be an excellent title. Massed troops can be quickly selected and sent to specific destinations, but invariably, some units get split off from the group and wander aimlessly. Separated targets are easy pickings, and players are forced to frantically attempt to rejoin their forces while simultaneously cursing the poor pathfinding A.I. It's also hard to fathom why *Extinction* so gleefully embraces such RTS staples as fog of war; it might be applicable for the aliens, but surely both the high-technology-employing humans and predators can whip up radar and spy satellites. Uninspired level design rounds out the package, with the designers relying far too much on impassable mountain ranges and forcing players to find roundabout routes to their targets.

E *—Greg Orlando*

FROM ELECTRONICS ARTS	PRICE	\$29.99
NEW ZOMB	PLAYERS	1
NEW AVAILABLE NOW	OS/EN	U.S.

GMR 6/10

BETTER THAN PREDATOR 2
WORSE THAN ALIENS
WAIT FOR IT: STARCRASH: HOST

EVE ONLINE
OH, ADAM. WHEREFORE ART THOU?

TEEN | PC

➔ One of the few science-fiction MMDRPGs in a market overly saturated with fairies and wizards, *Eve Online* promised a breath of fresh air but ends up being little more than an exercise in monotony. It is the epitome of wasted potential, with beautiful graphics, rich sounds, and some good ideas, all of which come to nothing due to unfocused gameplay, a poor interface, and its tedious nature.

Character generation is probably the most fun you'll have with *Eve*. There are many options available, including dozens of professions and 12 subraces. Your character's look is also highly customizable, endearing the game to you early on.

Unfortunately, the fun factor crashes down like an avalanche once you start playing. The tutorial is bad, the manual is nearly worthless, and the clunky interface requires too many clicks and drags to accomplish anything. And once you figure out how things work, you begin mining. You spend an eternity shooting at big rocks with mining lasers before you

can afford a decent ship or skill upgrade that allows you to survive encounters with anything tougher than training drones.

When you finally get into battles, you'll find that the generic click-and-watch combat wasn't worth the effort, and there's no sense of accomplishment or purpose in anything you do. *Eve* has some good ideas, such as player-formed corporations, skill training when you aren't logged on, dynamic economies, and a reputation and bounty system that regulates player killing. None of these makes up for its faults, but at least it doesn't have more elves.

E *—Di Luo*

FROM GIGAWATT GAMES	PRICE	\$29.99
NEW EVE GAMES	PLAYERS	1-4 (8 OF PEOPLE)
NEW AVAILABLE NOW	OS/EN	U.S.

GMR 5/10

BETTER THAN EARTH AND BEYOND
NOT AS GOOD AS MOST MMORPGS
WAIT FOR IT: JAIL-BREAK! ONLINE: SHADOWLANDS





→ Talk to the hand, and anyone else who li respond to you. Integral to the KOTOR world is the experience gained from the simple act of conversation. This factor alone makes talking to NPCs worthwhile, something other RPGs would do well to incorporate. Thankfully, the dialogue is super well-written. Chat chat away!



STAR WARS: K.O.T.O.R.

ROLE-PLAY. YOU WILL

TEEN | XBOX

PUBLISHER
DEVELOPER
FRONT
RELEASE
PLAYERS
CROSS

LEGENDS
BIOWARE
2003
JULY 2003
1
CROSS

➔ Let's establish something straight away—*Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic* is the best thing to happen to the *Star Wars* franchise since *The Empire Strikes Back*. BioWare has taken its peerless RPG experience, injected it with an awe-inspiring old-school *Star Wars* milieu, and crafted one of the best role-playing games of all time.

But what makes *KOTOR* so good in an age of *Final Fantasies* and *Suikoden*s? Oh, young Padawan, let us count the ways.

1) **The game is enormous.**

While this is not always a good thing (some RPGs, like *Dragon Warrior VII*, outstay their welcome), in *KOTOR*'s case it's fantastic because you never want the

game to end. It's 10 hours before you see so much as a Jedi, and by the time you become one, you've barely begun. Not only is the game physically huge (you star-hop across a half-dozen planets, including Tatooine, Dantooine, and the Wookiee planet Kashyyyk), but the sheer number of quests, miniquests, and sub-mini-side-quests is also seemingly endless.

2) **There's never a dull moment.**

Unlike many RPGs, in which the obligatory fetch quests make you feel like King Arthur's paperboy, *KOTOR*'s quests are consistently engaging, involving, and downright fun. Mission objectives range from the usual seek-and-retrieve jobs to innovative *Hardy Boys*-esque murder

mysteries that put your fledgling Jedi mind powers to the test.

3) **The battle system rocks.**

Not quite real-time, not quite turn-based, but somewhere in-between, *KOTOR*'s battle engine offers tremendous depth while being intimately adjustable. During combat, when the hazy chaos of flashing lightsabers might cause lesser games to choke, *KOTOR* lets gamers switch between characters (up to three in your party), target different enemies, and select from a multitude of offensive and defensive attacks, powers, or item management options. Your support characters can also be fine-tuned with differing tactical algorithms to suit the

WHOSE SIDE ARE YOU ON?

KOTOR offers a tangibly different experience depending on which side of the Force you walk. Dark side followers are stronger but have weaker healing powers, while Light side abilities are quite the opposite.

LIGHT SIDE



DARK SIDE



→ Side quests are the best way to earn extra experience, money, armor, weapons, and supplies in *KOTOR*. Try to complete every possible side quest you can. They're all profitable and fun!



situation. The actual statistical details (saving throws, plus/minus attributes) that make BioWare's other games so deep are all handled in an efficient behind-the-scenes manner, making actual gameplay a no-headaches breeze.

4) Customization is king.

Every one of the endless body, head, hand, arm, belt, weapon, and implant accessories found in the game reflects (when equipped) on the actual character models. That's cool.

5) You choose your own path.

Whether you choose to walk the path of the light side or the dark side, the choice is always yours. The ramifications of this decision affect your efficiency in all

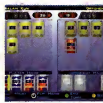
TIME TO PLAY

Adventuring isn't the only thing you get to do in *KOTOR*. Sometimes, you get to blow crap up via the Skywalkerish star-fighter sequences. You can also play a blackjack-esque game of Pazaak, or try to beat the game's fastest times in Swoop Racing. **B**

STARFIGHTER



PAZAAK



SWOOP RACING



sorts of ways. Dark followers are lousy at healing spells but more powerful, while light-side acolytes are challenged and rewarded in other ways. Repeated plays of this game are essential.

6) Superior script and voice acting.

Whether you opt to exploit the conversational and superbly written script or just cut the dialogue short, there is no wasted effort here. Unlike many RPGs, in which NPCs usually offer one or two lines of true conversation, in *KOTOR*, every word counts.

Sure, *KOTOR* has some issues, like irritating loading times, a lack of variety among NPC character models, and lots of running around. And the graphics,

while structurally impressive, could use an extra lick of paint. But even in a field thick with contenders, *Knights of the Old Republic* reigns supreme. It redefines what the genre is capable of—a testament to its beauty, diversity, and absolute replayability. Epic in scope and built to last, *KOTOR* is everything you'd ever want in a Star Wars game.

B+ James Mielke

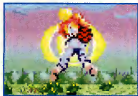
GMR

BRILLIANT 10/10

BETTER THAN FINAL FANTASY'S BEST RPG SINCE DIES OF ARCADIA. WAIT FOR IT: TRUE FANTASY LIVE ONLINE.

2ND OPINION

It looks like the delays were worth it, because *KOTOR* is absolutely fantastic. For anyone who enjoyed Japanese RPGs like *Final Fantasy* and *Chrono Cross*, but it's retreating to see a console RPG just as good, if not better, come from the West. And the story puts recent console games to shame you must buy **B+** *Andrew Hirst*



GBA REVIEW

THIS MONTH, WE REVISIT THE GOLDEN AGE OF ARCADE QUARTER MUNCHERS AND THE JOY OF RIDING IN TAXIS

CRAZY TAXI: CATCH A RIDE SHE DRIVES ME CRAZY

EVERYONE | GBA

THQ's *Crazy Taxi: Catch a Ride* manages to cram both cities, all four drivers, and the Crazy Box challenges from the original Dreamcast *Crazy Taxi* into one Game Boy Advance cartridge. That's pretty impressive. However, it's missing the original game's great controls and sense of speed, rendering all that other good stuff a wasted effort. A slow, tedious *Crazy Taxi* game isn't *Crazy Taxi* at all, and it's definitely not worth your money.

Again, things start out well. The GBA port retains the familiar special moves—Crazy Drift, Limiter Cut—and the first few fares go smoothly. Run into a complex route, though, and suddenly, the controls aren't up to the task.

A few factors are at fault here. One, the framerate is choppy, which kills the sensation of speed and hampers turning precision. Two, the collision detection is thoroughly wonky. Racking up combos in traffic is impossible when you can't tell whether you'll bump into that oncoming semi. Three, the D-pad steering handles like an Isuzu NPR in reverse. If the collision boxes don't get you, the digital controls will.

Aside from the controls, *Catch a Ride* has a lot going for it. Its architecture is faithful to the arcade version, it links fares together well, it's not bad as visual quality goes, and the system's audio limitations do the game a favor, replacing the infamous Offspring tunes with tolerable instrumentals. But *Crazy Taxi* can't work without spot-on controls and blistering speed, and those are nowhere to be found. **D+** *Dave Smith*

PER TITLE	PRICE: \$29.99
DEV: GRAPHIC CREDS	PLAYERS: 1
YTD: AVAILABLE NOW	REGION: JAPAN

GMR 4¹⁰

BETTER THAN: ADVANCE GTA
ON PAR WITH: SEGA RALLY
WAIT FOR IT: A BIGGER TIP



SEGA ARCADE GALLERY FROM WAY BACK IN THE DAY

EVERYONE | GBA

There's something to be said for being older. Growing up during the '70s and '80s provided many benefits, KC and The Sunshine Band being one of them. But if *disco* wasn't your bag, there were always videogames. Sure, *Asteroids* and *Ms. Pac-Man* were fun for a while, but it wasn't until games started moving into the foreground that things really took off.

Sega Arcade Gallery's four games—*Outrun*, *Afterburner*, *Super Hang-On*, and *Space Harrier*—were all developed by Sega's premier arcade games developer, AM2 (which stood for Arcade Machines 2nd division). Headed by the legendary Yu Suzuki, AM2 paved the way for neo-3D games by hurling the player into an onrushing, scrolling foreground. *Outrun* pulverizes *Pole Position*, sending you racing through checkpoints in a Ferrari with a blonde riding shotgun and "Magical Sound Shower" blasting from the radio. *Afterburner* puts you in the cockpit of a jet fighter, with an unlimited amount of Vulcan ammo and a grip of heat-seeking missiles at the ready. *Super Hang-On* puts knees on the street as racers experience the thrills of motorcycle racing like never before. And *Space Harrier*, a game that has influenced scores of more-recent shooters like *Panzer Dragoon* and *Real* is back, with our hero running and flying through the skies on his trusty jetpack, shooting down Easter Island heads and malevolent dragon bosses.

The games survive in excellent fashion on GBA, with sharp colors and fast framerates. Sure, some of the games seem a lot harder when they used to be (cough, *Outrun*, cough), but for quick on-the-go gaming, this collection has clearly stood the test of time. **A-** *James Mielke*

PER TITLE	PRICE: \$19.99
DEV: ANIMATED STORIES	PLAYERS: 1
YTD: AVAILABLE NOW	REGION: JAPAN

GMR 7¹⁰

BETTER THAN: NAMCO MUSEUM
NOT AS GOOD AS: WAKEMORE
JUST IN TIME FOR: SUPER MARIO ADVANCE 4



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TIPS, CODES, MOVIES, AND MORE



THIS MONTH IN MORE

SOUL CALIBUR II 083

→ EGM's Shawn Elliott wants you to play better *Soul Calibur*

TOP 10 TIPS: AL 086

→ *Vice City* codes for the PS2 set

SCREEN 088

→ *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, *Daredevil*, and *Futurama*

RETROACTIVE 090

→ Stand back, we're going totally *Berzerk*

THE LIST 092

→ Now with 100 percent more GBA flavor!

GAME DEEZER 098

→ Parents: Do your jobs

SOUL CALIBUR II

WELCOME TO FIGHT CLUB

TOMORROW'S BATTLE IS WON DURING TODAY'S PRACTICE.

➔ Proficiency in the basics of dueling is essential. In fact, it might be even more essential than encyclopedic knowledge of your character's attacks. You can enclose yourself in a cage of saber strokes and still perish if you don't have these fundamentals down pat. To that effect, make perfecting these basics your first priority before moving on to your own patented brand of death dealing.

GUARD IMPACT

One should make his decisions within the space of seven breaths.

The guard impact is so essential to *Soul Calibur II* mastery that the premier fraternity of players named its website after the move (take a peep at www.guardimpact.com). Where most fighters rely on canned reversals to regain the initiative, SC2's alternative is elegant in its simplicity. By pressing Back and Block, any contender can deflect an incoming thrust, opening up his or her opponent to retaliation. Timing is crucial, and there's a heavy price to pay for poorly timed or predictable parrying. The strategy doesn't stop there, though. Although your foe is open to attack once you've blunted his strike, he can still flip the script with a guard impact of his own (in fact, skilled players can exchange timed parries in a cinematic stalemate of clashing swords). If you're serious about rethinking your

scrubby ways, try setting up your A.I. sparring partner so he counterattacks all hits, forcing you to complete the cycle or take one in the face. Practice, of course, makes perfect.



AIR CONTROL

Take arrows in your forehead, but never in your back.

In this fighting game, when someone pops you into the air, you're anything but a helpless pincushion. Simply put, air control lets you shift your weight in midair

and out of alignment with your enemy's cleaver. So rather than passively watch someone practice combos on your soon-to-be corpse, flip to safety by pressing the D-pad in the appropriate direction.



Mastering the art of air recovery can also keep you in the ring, but be warned: Overambitious usage can lead to your opponent landing even larger strings. And that's something you really don't want.

RING OUTS

...if you are slain in battle, you should be resolved to having your corpse face the enemy.

Whining won't save you. In fact, the more bitterly you complain about ring outs, the more likely a better player will introduce you to the abyss. Your first priority is to master the terrain. If you're aware of your surroundings, you won't have to wait till someone pushes you to the edge of the arena before sidestepping to safety. If that fails, you should be aware of your opponent's obvious ring-out attacks. Depending on where you stand in relation to the edge, he'll usually have at least one move that sends you sailing to the center of the earth. And, of course, if you can predict that move, parrying it will be that much easier. Depending on your character, you might have an attack of your own, or you might have a throw that flips your victim over your head, either reversing your positions or ejecting him from the stage altogether. Study your nemesis's favorites closely—it'll pay off.



MIX IT UP

Become acquainted with every art.

Predictability is your worst enemy. The fact is painfully obvious, yet somehow underappreciated. Let's illustrate with Voldo. The contortionist's Blind Dive move (Down Forward + B) makes

an excellent match opener. Like a human arrow flung from a taut bow, the flying freak instantly closes the starting gap between him and his foe with a high hit. But if you foolishly persist in drawing from the same well, your opponent will wise up. In this case, all he has to do is hold Guard, and you'll land helplessly in his lap. So, if you're smart, you'll turn his expectations against him and hit low on the next opening. The same goes for any rush. The trick is to establish a pattern so the opposition thinks he's got you pegged—then you can draw on different attacks that hit in a pattern contrary to what he's expecting (e.g., instead of a high, low combo, one that goes low, then high). He'll never see it coming. ➔



XB

PS2

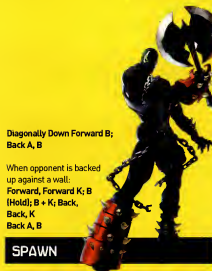
GC

COMBOS AND CUSTOM STRINGS

You can prevent your opponent from defeating you through defense, but to win you must kick ass.

➔ Now that you've built a repertoire of basic skills, it's time to showboat. Any one of the attack strings listed here can shrivel a victim's confidence faster than an appearance on the *Springer Show*, but they should still be used sparingly (you were

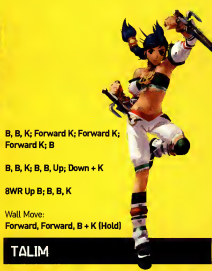
paying attention to our sermon on predictability, right?). Note that what you see here is by no means comprehensive. Unfortunately, our advertising deals with Craftmatic Adjustable Beds fell through, and we couldn't afford the page space to catalog them all. ☛



Diagonally Down Forward B;
Back A, B

When opponent is backed
up against a wall:
Forward, Forward K; B
(Hold); B + K; Back,
Back, K
Back A, B

SPAWN



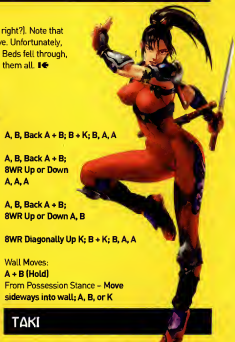
B, B, K; Forward K; Forward K;
Forward K; B

B, B, K; B, B, Up; Down + K

SWR Up B; B, B, K

Wall Move:
Forward, Forward, B + K (Hold)

TALIM



A, B, Back A + B; B + K; B, A, A

A, B, Back A + B;
SWR Up or Down
A, A, A

A, B, Back A + B;
SWR Up or Down A, B

SWR Diagonally Up K; B + K; B, A, A

Wall Moves:
A + B (Hold)
From Possession Stance - Move
sideways into wall; A, B, or K

TAKI



Diagonally Back
Down K; Down A +
K; K; Down A + B

Back B (Hold); Down (Roll onto
belly); A; B; B + K

Wall Moves:
From Mantis Crawl -
Back into wall
Diagonally Down
Forward A + B
(Hold)

VOLDO



Up A
+ B; A;
A; Up B + K

SWR Up or
Down B
(Hold); A; B

SWR Up or
Down B
(Hold); A;
Back B + K

IVY



Diagonally Down Forward
B; A; Diagonally Down Back
B, B

Diagonally Down Forward
B; Forward B, Forward
B, B, B

RAPHAEL

ENIGMA: RISING TIDE

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"the ocean effects... are so
convincing that you may find
yourself reaching for
Dramamine."

PC Gamer (77%)

"a host of other details and
engineering touches make
Enigma superior to most naval
games that have come before it."

SubSim Review (88%)

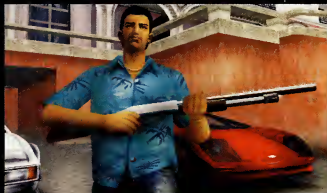
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A.I.

HIS CODES ARE REAL, BUT HE IS NOT

There's a good chance you've seen *The Hulk* in theaters by now. Whether you liked it is a different matter, but the game certainly has its share of smashing. When you get tired of breaking things, check out our stamina builder for *Brute Force* or bust a few tricks with Shaun Palmer in *Wakeboarding Unleashed*. Anything to pass the time until Vivendi Universal can render us an interactive Jennifer Connelly.



01 GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY PC

Give PC brethren their due. While console owners were tearing up the streets in stolen cars and shooting innocent bystanders, PC gamers were patiently waiting for their turn. Now their time has come—and, appropriately, they can cheat just as hard as console fans. Enter these codes during gameplay.

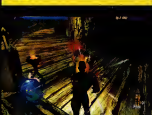
All Light Weapons
All Medium Weapons
All Heavy Weapons
Full Health
Full Armor
Suicide
Raise Wanted Level
Decrease Wanted Level
Women Follow You
Smoke a Cigarette
Tommy Gains Weight
Tommy Becomes Effeminate
Change Skin/Clothing
Play as Ricardo Diaz
Play as Lance Vance
Play as Ken Rosenberg
Play as Hilary King
Play as Love Fist Member Jazz Toretto
Play as Love Fist Member Dick
Play as Phil Cassidy
Play as Sonny Forelli
Play as Mercedes
Spawn a Rhino
Spawn a Bloodring Banger
Spawn a Bloodring Banger #2
Spawn a Sabre Turbo
Spawn a Hotring Racer

THUGSTOOLS
PROFESSIONALTOOLS
NUTTERTOOLS
ASPIRINE
PRECIOUSPROTECTION
ICANTTAKEITANYMORE
YOUWONTTAKEMEALIVE
LEAVEMEALONE
FANNYMAGNET
CERTAINOATH
OEEFRIEDMARSBARS
PROGRAMMER
STILLLIKEORESSINGUP
CHEATSHAVEBEENCRACKED
LOOKLIKELANCE
MYSONISALAWYER
LOOKLIKEHILARY
ROCKANOROLLMAN
WELOVEDUROCK
ONEARMEOBANOIT
IOONHAVETHEMONEYSONNY
FOXYLITLLETHING
PANZER
TRAILINSTYLE
GETTHEREQUICKLY
GETTHEREFAST
GETTHEREVERYFASTNOEE

Spawn a Hotring Racer #2
Spawn a Romero's Hearse
Spawn Love Fist's Limo
Spawn a Trashmaster
Spawn a Caddy
Nearby Cars Explode
Aggressive Drivers
All Cars Turn Pink
All Cars Turn Black
Cars Can Fly
Perfect Handling
All Traffic Lights Are Green
Cars Gain Hovercraft Technology
Cars Become Invisible Except for Wheels
Sports Cars Have Big Wheels
Pedestrians Get in Your Car
Sunny Weather
Light Clouds
Foggy Weather
Stormy Weather
Accelerate Game Clock
Accelerate Game
Decelerate Game
Pedestrians Riot
Pedestrians Hate You
Pedestrians Carry Guns
Girls Carry Guns

GETTHEREAMAZINGLYFAST
THELASTROCK
ROCKANDROLLCAR
RUBBISHCAR
BETTERTHANWALKING
BIGBANG
MIAMITRAFFIC
AHAIRORESSERSCAR
IWANTITPAINTEDBLACK
COMEFLYWITHME
GRIPSEVERYTHING
GREENLIGHT
SEAWAYS
WHEELSAREALLINEO
LOASOFLITLLETHINGS
HOPINGIRL
ALOVELYDAY
APLEASANTOAY
CANTSEETHING
CATSANOOGS
LIFEISPASSINGMEBY
ONSPEED
BOOGBOODRING
FIGHTRIGHTFIGHT
NOBODYLIKESME
OURGOOIVENRIGHTTOBEARARMS
CHICKSWITHGUNS

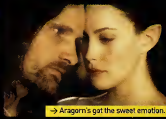
02 BRUTE FORCE: XBBOX



It's not Bungie's epic, but in a year without *Halo 2*, *Brute Force* is king. Although this tip is technically not a code, it will greatly increase your enjoyment of the game. There's a direct relation between your characters' stamina bars and what they're doing. The more active they are, the longer it will take to recover their stamina and use their special moves. For example, if Tex does nothing but run, it will take him more than four minutes to completely recover. But by simply crouching in place (click and hold the left thumbstick), Tex's bar will recharge in only 30 seconds. Order your squad to take a knee after a battle and you'll be able to use its abilities three times more often than normal.

SCREEN

THE EPIC JOURNEY CONTINUES. BEN GETS BLINDSIDED. AND A FUTURAMA BENDER



→ Aragorn's got the sweet emotion.



→ Gandalf the Gray returns as Gandalf the White. Tide with bleach. It works!

LOTR: THE TWO TOWERS
THE PRECIOUS DVD

RATED PG-13 | 175 MINUTES | 2 DISCS | DIRECTED BY PETER JACKSON

➔ This is what movie-making is all about. Truly diehard fans will moan about the liberties taken with Tolkien's masterpiece, but if there is any doubt in your mind that these are three of the greatest hours in movie history, well, we hope you get eaten by an orc.

Picking up right where *The Fellowship of the Ring* left off, *The Two Towers* splits its narrative between the Mordor-bound Frodo and Sam, along with most of the rest of the gang, who are dealing with malevolent forces at the other tower, Isengard—home of good-guy-gone-bad Saruman. Finally, Merry and Pippin meet Middle-earth's oldest inhabitants, the Ents, and get in some quality tree hugging.

Director Peter Jackson's vision of this—the second part of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy—is epic in every sense of the word. The

casting is note-perfect across the board. Special mention to Viggo Mortensen as Aragorn, whose slow but sure transformation from mysterious drifter to king [we don't think I'm giving anything away here] is pained, somewhat reluctant, yet inevitably triumphant in a genuinely human way. Elijah Wood (playing Frodo) so well that he was surely a hobbit in a previous life) leaves us in no doubt of the huge burden of the One Ring. Finally, he may just be ones and zeros, but Gollum takes the award for most lifelike pixels ever—honorable mention to Andy Serkis for his movements on which the CGI is based.

Countless New Zealand locations bring Middle-earth to life so well that it's almost tempting to believe that Tolkien based parts of his fictional account on these actual places.

The Two Towers' scale is huge,

but in so many ways, it's the attention to tiny details that sets this movie apart from the rest. As the saying goes, "The devil is in the details." Inlays on weapons, edging on tunics, and the hair on hobbits' oversized feet all combine to create a remarkably real world. Sauron would be proud.

And one of the most bloody, bone-splintering scenes ever—a few hundred elves and men versus about a bazillion orcs at the Battle of Helm's Deep—provides the perfect example of a movie with a creative team at the top of its game. Roll on, part three.

Special features: Top marks. The second (extra!) DVD includes two documentaries, eight featurettes on various aspects of the movie, previews of *The Return of the King* videogame and movie, trailers, and a music video. **B+**

MORE

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→ They're so cute when they're fighting.



→ No caption necessary. Just look.

DAREDEVIL

JUST MISSES THE MARK

2 DISCS | DIRECTED BY MARK STEVEN JOHNSON

➔ **Daredevil** is the latest Marvel superhero to get the big-screen treatment, and, while this movie has its moments, something gets lost in the translation.

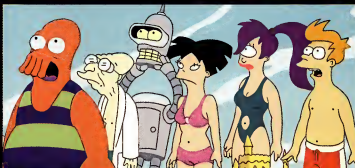
The *Daredevil* comic-book character has a little more subtlety, depth, and darkness than, say, *Spider-Man* or *The Hulk*, and Director Mark Steven Johnson does a perfectly good (if not great) job of transferring these qualities to our onscreen *Daredevil*, all the time delivering the necessary thrills and jokes. Not to mention an engaging story.

Ben Affleck makes a pretty damn good superhero, but it's Colin Farrell who steals the show as Bullseye—so named for his ability to throw anything, even a paper clip...fatally! Sound ridiculous? Well, it is. But it's thoroughly entertaining nonetheless.

Special features: An excellent package on these two discs. Too many extras to mention them all, but highlights include director's commentary, onscreen trivia track, making-of features, screen tests, and the HBO First Look. **B+**

FUTURAMA - VOL. 2

THE FUTURE IS NOW. TODAY!



→ You see, it's funny because Katey Segal was on...



→ Philip J. Fry, defender of the universe

➔ Boasting 19 episodes on four discs, this Volume 2 DVD set is quality in quantity. Fans seem to agree that *Futurama*'s second season is the strongest and funniest. We're inclined to believe them.

It's tempting to view *Futurama* as a poor man's *Simpsons*, but that does it a disservice. Like *The Simpsons*, *Futurama* has a seemingly endless supply of sharp, satirical humor, but it distinguishes itself with inventive characters and story lines and countless moments that are literally laugh-out-loud funny.

Fox has put the show on hold, so *Futurama*'s future is uncertain. Whatever happens, it's going to be a long time before this volume loses its shine.

Special features: Commentaries for every episode, deleted scenes, concept art, videogame trailer, and animatics (early production version in raw black/white with little animation) for one episode, which gives insight into the creative process. **A-**

FUTURAMA: VOLUME 2 (2) FOX HOME VIDEO (2) DIRECTED BY MATT GROENING (2) DISCS: 4 (2) EPISODES: 19

XB
PC
PS2
GBA
GC

RETROACTIVE

OLDER GAMES NEED PLAYIN'. TOO. GMR PROVIDES A GOOD LITTLE GUIDE TO GOOD LITTLE STUFF

BERSERK: GUTS' RAGE IT'S IN THE WAY THAT YOU USE IT

DREAMCAST | MARCH 2000

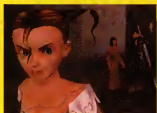
➔ 2D beat-em-ups of the hack-n-slash variety pretty much peaked around the time of Sega's *Guardian Heroes*. But the first real next-gen 3D action game of that style to make any impact was *Sword of the Berserk* for Dreamcast. Based on the manga by Kentaro Miura, the game opens a window into the world of Guts, the sword-swinging berserker mercenary.

Unlike most games of this nature, including North American publisher Eidos' own *Fighting Force*, *Berserk* actually had a strong story line and equally strong voice acting to support it (vocal chores were handled by the

respected *Soul Reaver* actors). Now, all *Berserk* needed was some hectic action to fill things out, and it had it in spades.

Whether you were using something from Guts' arsenal of crossbow bolts, explosives, and throwing knives, or his arm cannon, you were never short of offensive options. But the real fun was in using Guts' Dragonslayer broadsword, which would make some of the most intimidating sounds ever heard in a videogame (along with the chopping heads off part). The good news is that the developer, Yukes, is currently working on a sequel for PS2.

1+ **_James Mielke**



NOW Kick-ass now, it's worth picking up a copy of the game. It still looks good and plays well. A fantastic action game.

OBTAINABLE

GMR 7¹⁰

THEN Kick-ass for the time, *Sword of the Berserk* wasn't especially long, but it was challenging and atmospheric. So cool!

SWARTHY

GMR 8¹⁰



➔ If you own a Dreamcast and don't already have this excellent hack-n-slash game, look high and low for it—it's worth the effort.



➔ Four console games at the time effectively evoked the wonder of deep-space combat. Ships, stars, and nebulae of all sizes made space a whole lot more interesting than the standard black fare.



➔ Vengeance features an array of deadly fighters, each one is outfitted with missiles, particle cannons, and the ever-riffy grappling gun.

COLONY WARS MY GOD! IT'S FULL OF STARS!

PLAYSTATION | 1995

➔ In its time, U.K.-based Psygnosis was one of the industry's shining stars, a small, style-savvy developer with a pint-sized portfolio of titles, several unrivaled in their respective genres. While its superlative *WipeOut* series (deservedly) received the lion's share of attention, *Colony Wars* was one of the finest deep-space shooters to be enjoyed by the PlayStation generation.

The sequel, dubbed *Vengeance*, perfected the formula established by its predecessor: gorgeous graphics, compelling physics, a tactile sense of control, and a deliciously ambiguous story line (player's allegiances flip-flopped between the first and second games) featuring sophisticated sci-fi of the coldest, driest sort. Colorful clusters of stars and brilliant nebulae filled the

sky, giving the genre a much needed graphical kick in the pants. And rather than being part of a simplistic universe, the player was immersed in a massive world teeming with capital ships, alien aggressors, and political intrigue.

Players could enjoy an impressive array of mission types in true 3D (as opposed to *Rogue Squadron's* more polar physics), including defending bases, mining for ore, towing leaky reactors, and stealing alien fighters, all nicely counter-balanced with a hefty dose of dogfighting.

Psygnosis hit hard times with the departure of key players, and a third *Wars*, called *Red Sun*, was aborted. It was later picked up and distributed by Midway; the result was noteworthy only for it's limited distribution run.

1+ **_David Chen**

NOW Holds up remarkably well. *Vengeance* and its two-disc predecessor are fairly easy to find, and they sell at a reasonable price.

EASY TO FIND

GMR 8¹⁰

THEN With 40 challenging missions spanning 19 acts and six possible endings, *Vengeance* gave starfighters a lot of bang for their buck.

GMR 9¹⁰

MORE
test codes, strategies, DVDs and more!



→ Tough-guy A.I., big boss battles, and a befuddled cop named Barney. What's missing? Not much at all, really.



HALF-LIFE

BEST PC GAME EVER

PC CD-ROM | 1998

→ Since everybody and their grandma are waiting for *Half-Life 2* (and if you're not, go to the blackboard and write "I am not a gamer" 1,000 times), we thought it was high time to revisit the original. Actually, anytime would be a good time to go back to *Half-Life* because it still plays great. Just as Orson Welles created one of the classics of American cinema with his first film, *Citizen Kane*, Valve Software created one of the landmarks of digital entertainment with its first game.

This is no exaggeration. No one had seen anything like *Citizen Kane* when it came out, and the same can be said of *Half-Life*. It's so smartly entertaining and superior to anything else around it that it has not aged at all. If anything, it's more amazing now because it's clear upon replaying it that no PC shooter

created in the five years since its release has beaten it. (Although some, like *Medal of Honor* and *No One Lives Forever*, have been great.)

So, why is *Half-Life* so great? There are a million reasons, but you can boil them down to one word: tension. From the moment you boot up the game, *Half-Life* plunges you into its nightmarish world, and it never lets up. Nothing takes you out of the story—no cut-scenes, no load screens, no mission briefings. The story plays out as you experience it, through a then-innovative and brilliant use of scripted events that are triggered as you progress. (Yeah, everyone does it now, but *Half-Life* was one of the first.)

The game's pacing and level design are masterful, giving you something new and unexpected around every corner, combining standard FPS battles with genuine

brainwork and puzzle solving. Even the bosses rule. They are usually visible way before you can beat them, making the payoff that much more cathartic when you finally do succeed. And it is a particularly perverse bit of genius that some of the game's scariest moments are provided by the tinnest and weakest monsters—those infernal headcrabs.

Upon its release, *Half-Life* instantly made every other first-person shooter either already out or still in development instantly dated and irrelevant. Five years later, it is still the shooter by which all others are measured, still the one most developers don't have a clue how to equal. If you can't understand all the fuss and hype over *Half-Life 2*, go back and play the original. Then start drooling with anticipation like the rest of us.

1C-Jeff Green

WELCOME TO THE GAMING CYCLE

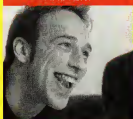
DISCOVERY



FRUSTRATION



MASTERY



BOREDOM*



*DISCOVER THE CURE
FOR BOREDOM.

WE SELL THOUSANDS
OF 100% GUARANTEED
PREOWNED GAMES.

NOW... A genuine masterpiece that still plays better than 99 percent of the games out there, regardless of genre. *Half-Life* has it all. **ORTANABLE**

GMR 10¹⁰ TIMELESS

THEN... *Half-Life* blew away the entire gaming community, garnering perfect scores across the board and raising the FPS bar.

GMR 10¹⁰ PEERLESS



EBGAMES™
electronics boutique

THE LIST

GMA'S EXHAUSTIVE GUIDE TO THE ONLY GAMES THAT MATTER

BUYER'S GUIDE

PS2 TOP 100 DANCE THE NIGHT AWAY

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	OUR RATING
Josh/Infection	Bandai	The world's first MMORPG, but this time the 0 stands for "offline." Comes packed with a DVD of the animated series.	7
Jack/Mutation	Bandai	We've exhausted our supply of "something within a something" jokes, so just know that the series starts to pick up in this sequel.	8
Amplitude	Sony	A whole slew of new artists who, naturally, bring along brand-new tunes for your button-pressing pleasure.	6
ATV Offroad Fury	Sony	The key to being a successful ATV offroader lies in launching yourself through the air as often as possible. A fun and lively racer.	7
Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance	Interplay	A beautiful-looking Dungeons & Dragons-based hack-and-slash that can be played cooperatively with another player.	8
Breath of Fire: Dragon Quarter	Capcom	An RPG that forces you to die and start over multiple times? It sounds ridiculous, but it actually works.	8
Burnout 2: Point of Impact	Acclaim	An aggressive driving simulator that defies the rules of physics. Includes a dedicated Crash mode for aspiring demolition-derby stars.	8
Capcom vs. SNK 2	Capcom	Take the best elements of <i>Street Fighter</i> and <i>King of Fighters</i> , and you'll have the best thing going in the world of 2D combat.	8
Chaos Legion	Capcom	Storm through 15 levels of nonstop action, commanding various squads of bodyguards. It's like <i>Devil May Cry</i> , only not so antisocial.	8
Colin McRae Rally 3	Codemasters	A superb rally racer with superrealistic properties—right down to the extended time you spend sitting in the Ford Focus.	8
Contra: Shattered Soldier	Konami	After numerous shoddy attempts to bring the classic <i>Contra</i> gameplay to a next-gen system, Konami finally gets it right.	8
Crazy Taxi	Acclaim	As good as opening your PlayStation 2, rigging Dreamcast hardware inside, and then loading up a DC build of <i>Crazy Taxi</i> .	8
Dance Dance Revolution: DDRMax	Konami	Before, if you wanted to play <i>DDR</i> , you had to subject yourself to Joe and Jane Public. Now, you can embarrass yourself at home.	8
Dark Cloud 2	Sony	Improves upon the first one in every way imaginable. Building and upgrading weapons to your liking is a blast.	9
Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2	Acclaim	Before turning to Larry Flynt for inspiration, XXX was based on the well-mannered Dave Mirra and actually focused on biking.	8
Dead or Alive 2: Hardcore	Tecmo	Before the entire series went Xbox exclusive, Team Ninja's gang of jiggly grapplers found a temporary home on PS2.	8
Deus Ex: The Conspiracy	Bidos	One of the best PC games of 2000 is ported faithfully to PS2. Upgrade your character's skills and attributes as you see fit.	8
Devil May Cry	Capcom	Did you know <i>Devil May Cry</i> was going to be <i>Resident Evil 4</i> before it was spun off into its own series? Oh, you did? Never mind, then.	9
Dynasty Warriors 3	Koei	Melee combat set to the history of ancient China. Enemies number in the hundreds along branching story paths.	8
Escape from Monkey Island	Sony Online	LucasArts has a fine tradition of putting out excellent graphical adventure games, and this latest charmer is no exception.	9
EverQuest Online: Adventures	LucasArts	PS2 owners finally get to see what the whole <i>EverQuest</i> thing is about—and will never be seen again.	8
F1 2002	EA Sports	Minor refinements over the 2001 version may not be enough to justify the upgrade, but it's still a solid F1 game.	8
Final Fantasy X	Square EA	PS2's first <i>Final Fantasy</i> does away the traditional overworld, but introduces full voice acting. Artistically beautiful, as always.	9
The Getaway	Sony	Opinions vary wildly on this British-themed gangster (not gangsta) game. Even the British can't agree!	8
Gran Turismo 2 A-spec	Sony	Core gameplay is unchanged, but the graphics get a complete overhaul, which makes GT2 the best-looking/looking sim on the market.	10
Grand Theft Auto III	Rockstar Games	A phenomenon of both gameplay and sales. A free-roaming interactive mobster film that's sold more than 8 million copies to date.	9
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	As bad boy Tommy Vercetti, there's something indescribably cool about cruising Vice City's beach strip while rocking to "Billie Jean."	10
Guitar Hero XX	Sony	Tired of waiting for <i>Strat Finger 47</i> ? This one should more than compensate. Great visuals, great control, and great extras.	8
Half-Life	Sierra	After it was cancelled for Dreamcast, a console version of this PC classic didn't seem very likely. But here we are.	8
Harvest Moon: Save the Homeland	Natsume	It's a farming simulator. It's fun. These two statements may seem wildly incongruous, but somehow, <i>Harvest Moon</i> makes it work.	8
High Heat 2004	3DO	The best ball game available this year. "Simulation" doesn't seem like a strong enough word to describe it.	8
Hitman 2	Edios	Most of the problems with the original <i>Hitman</i> have been fixed, making this one of the more rewarding action games on PS2.	9
Hot Shots Golf 3	Sony	Some golf games need something extra to attract gamers. How about arcade-style control, innuendo taunts, and multiplayer madness?	9
Ice	Sony	An underappreciated work of art with challenging puzzles, fantastic lightings, and engrossing character relationships.	9
Jak and Daxter: The Precursor Legacy	Sony	The studio that gave birth to <i>Crash Bandicoot</i> brings a couple new mascots and a gorgeous new 3D world to PS2.	9
Jet Set Radio	Sony	More extreme-sports fun, but this time, it's all wet. Finishing is only half the battle; performing tricks factors into the final standings.	8
K-1 Grand Prix	Konami	The budding sport of K1 is faithfully represented here, as are the knockout blows to the jaw that sound just as painful as they look.	8
Kingdom Hearts	Square EA	When the amazing, talented artists from Square join forces with the amazing, talented artists from Disney, good things happen.	8
Klonoa 2: Luncheon's Veil	Infogrames	Klonoa became a rare find in the later days of PlayStation. The outstanding sequel looks to share the same fate. Grab it if you can.	8
Le Mans 24 Hours	Infogrames	There's an option to play the famous endurance race true-to-life: 24 hours straight of driving. Better stop out on Mountain Dew.	8
The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers	EA Games	Anything bearing the valuable <i>Lord of the Rings</i> license will sell well. Happily, there's more to this beat-up-em-up than just the name.	8
Madden NFL 2003	EA Sports	The series' first foray into online console gaming is a success. Everything you love about Madden can now be shared with strangers.	9
The Mark of Kri	Sony	A slick action game with innovative controls: Each button is assigned to a different enemy, allowing for combat with multiple targets.	8
Maximo: Ghosts to Glory	Capcom	It's the spiritual successor to the classic <i>Ghosts 'n Goblins</i> , complete with heart boxers and insane difficulty.	8
MDK 2 Armageddon	Interplay	Much improved over the original, <i>Dreamcast</i> incarnation, <i>MDK 2</i> Armageddon is one of the better recent action games.	8
Medal of Honor: Frontline	Electronic Arts	A strong single-player campaign paves the way through the beaches of Normandy and the heart of France. Great audio.	8
Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance	Konami	There's a lot in this update: 350 VR missions, 150 alternate missions, five Snake Tales, and one skateboard. Yay, a skateboard.	8
Mighty King 2	Rockstar Games	Rockstar's rebellious racer is now online, but you'd better practice making the game's controls better before entering competition.	8
Mobile Suit Gundam: Federation vs. Zeon	Bandai	Giant robots are great, but basing them on the <i>Gundam</i> license with Capcom developing makes them greater. If that's even possible.	8
MotorGP 3	Namco	After three attempts, Namco got it right...sort of. The realism is astounding, as long as you ignore the giant Mr. Driller.	8

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	CMP. RATING
NASCAR Thunder 2003	EA Sports	Hate turning left for hours? NASCAR games probably aren't your thing. But if you get it, <i>Thunder 2003</i> should be right up your alley.	9
NBA 2K3	Sega Sports	Yet another compelling reason to own a PS2 Network Adaptor, NBA2K3 is the best-playing game of hoops on the system.	9
NBA Street Vol. 2	Electronic Arts	Even better than the first, Vol. 2 takes you through the legendary players and teams of the NBA's storied history. A great deal of fun.	9
NCAA Football 2003	EA Sports	A lot like Madden, only with exploited college kids and marching bands. It's also the best college football game available.	9
Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit 2	EA Games	Strangely, the game's best version is on the least-powerful hardware. Running from cops has never been this fun, or consequence free.	9
NFL 2K3	Sega Sports	Sega's latest football offer compares nicely to the firmly entrenched Madden juggernaut, and even beats it in some areas.	9
NHL 2002	Electronic Arts	Hockey is played on ice, with six men trying to put a puck into the other team's goal. This is a good digital representation of that sport.	9
NHL 2K3	Sega Sports	For the more discerning hockey connoisseur, NHL2K3 has made great strides since its debut on the now-defunct Dreamcast.	9
Onimusha 2: Samurai's Destiny	Capcom	The effort put forward in defeating Nobunga in <i>Onimusha</i> has gone to waste, as he's risen from the dead and is appearing in the sequel.	9
Onimusha: Warlords	Capcom	Survival-horror with a taste for feudal Japan, gorgeous artistic design, and a whole lot more action than its <i>Resident Evil</i> kin.	8
RAI: Robot Alchemic Drive	Enix	It's hard to go wrong with giant robots blowing stuff up, but Enix's latest effort goes one step further with a novel control scheme.	8
Ratchet & Clank	Sony	Insomniac's terrific action-platformer has you jumping from world to world in search of new weapons and gadgets.	8
Rayman 2: Revolution	Ubisoft	One of the best 3D platformers available, the <i>Rayman</i> franchise doesn't get the attention it deserves. It's good, and you should buy it.	9
Red Faction	THQ	A first-person shooter that features destructible environments, drivable vehicles, and a strong single-player campaign.	9
Resident Evil: Code: Veronica X	Capcom	More of a true sequel than <i>Resident Evil 3</i> , its Dreamcast debut meant many fans missed out. Problem solved!	8
Riz	Sega	A fairly standard shooter dressed as a visual and aural masterpiece. Sadly unappreciated by the vast majority of the gaming world.	8
Ridge Racer V	Namco	The always enjoyable <i>Ridge Racer</i> series scores well, thanks to solid control, an enthralling sense of speed, and a fitting soundtrack.	9
Rumble Racing	Electronic Arts	This fun arcade racer originally started out with the NASCAR license, but it was dropped in favor of original designs.	8
Rygar: The Legendary Adventure	Tecmo	This Greek mythology-based action game is an update of the arcade and NES classic in name only. Fun combat and great music.	8
Sega Sports Tennis	Sega	Arcade-style tennis perfection when it launched for Dreamcast. It's holding up just as well on PS2.	8
Silent Hill 2	Konami	More creepy than downright scary, the <i>Silent Hill</i> series takes a more sophisticated, cerebral approach to the survival-horror genre.	9
The Sims	Electronic Arts	A new mode helps you figure out how to keep your <i>Sims</i> from missing him. Dr. If you're like that, how to make him do it.	9
Sky Gunner	Ataris	If you can look past the slowdown issue (and it can be a pretty big issue at times), <i>Sky Gunner</i> is great shooting fun.	8
Sky Odyssey	Activision	A flight game that channels the spirit of <i>Pilots</i> , with mission-based gameplay and a large array of aircraft to pilot.	8
Sly Cooper and the Thieves Raccoon	Sony	A solid platformer with a unique aesthetic and animations. Lacks a little in the challenge department; it's a little on the short side, too.	8
Smuggler's Run	Rockstar Games	In keeping with Rockstar's games, <i>Smuggler's Run</i> indulges the inner criminal in all of us.	8
SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs	Sony	Possibly the best reason to own a PS2 Network Adaptor. The team-based military tactics work better online than off.	9
Splitter Cell	Ubisoft	As expected, the PS2 port of the Xbox original takes a graphical hit. Doesn't mean it's not still a great game, though.	8
Spy Hunter	Midway	No creation of the classic that manages to avoid tarnishing all the good memories, which can't be said for a lot of "classic" remakes.	8
SSX	Electronic Arts	A surprisingly good snowboarder with over-the-top stunts and great course design, it stands out as one of the best PS2 launch titles.	9
SSX Tricky	Electronic Arts	SSX Tricky boasts a new set of insane gravity-defying and physically impossible stunts, not to mention all-new tracks and characters.	9
Sub Rebellion	Metro3D	Customizable submarines rule the waters of the future, <i>Sub Rebellion</i> is an action game that's short on graphics but very entertaining.	8
Tekken Tag Tournament	Namco	Essentially Tekken 3 with enhanced graphics and a tag-teaming. Which isn't bad, considering Tekken 3 is a great game to begin with.	8
Tenchu: Wrath of Heaven	Activision	<i>Tenchu</i> sneaked out the list without us noticing. We were drunk on sake and telling tales of heroism, so that might be why.	8
Theme Park Roller Coaster	Electronic Arts	<i>Sim City</i> meets Six Flags. Design your own dangerous roller coasters without fear of getting slapped with wrongful-death lawsuits.	8
TimeSplitters 2	Crave	Everything good about the original is here, with loads of new multiplayer options, including mps, weapons, and game modes, too.	9
Tokyo Xtreme Racer Zero	Crave	Cruise Tokyo's highways in search of less-than-legal street-racing action. Despite some visual issues, it's definitely worth checking out.	8
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	Activision	Nervously dropped the 2-minute time limit in <i>Career</i> mode and added an array of objectives. Level design is a step up from THPS3.	9
Twisted Metal: Black	Sony	With the franchise safely out of the hands of 989 Studios, <i>Twisted Metal</i> makes a welcome return to its former, gruesome glory.	9
Twisted Metal: Black Online	Sony	If you buy a PS2 Network Adaptor, you get it for free. Which kind of makes sense, considering you can't play it without one.	9
Virtua Fighter 4	Sega	The <i>Virtua Fighter</i> series has always been finely crafted, and this version is no exception. The depth of this game is staggering.	10
Wakeboarding Unleashed	Activision	A surprisingly stellar extreme-sport title that manages to make the Tony Hawk formula work on water.	9
War of the Monsters	SCOA	King Kong's agent wanted a cool \$20 mil for this fun beat-'em-up, but Sony balked and went with the less-recognizable <i>Congra</i> .	9
Wild Arms 3	Sony	A grand adventure with a Wild West theme, endearing characters, great music, and a refreshingly uncomplicated battle system.	8
Wipeout Fusion	Bam	The Designer's Republic touch may be missing, but the series' oh-mitted, never surpassed style of racing remains intact.	8
World Series Baseball 2K3	Sega	WSB2K3 is the best-looking baseball game with a great Franchise mode, but it's got A.I. issues that need to be worked out.	8
World Soccer: Winning Eleven 6	Konami	Feet down, the most natural-feeling soccer game ever. It lacks FIFA's presentation and licenses, but makes up for it in gameplay.	9
WWF SmackDown! Just Bring It	THQ	Even if this game scored a zero, it would still set a truckload of copies. Such is the marketing power of Vince McMahon & family.	8
Xenogears	Namco	A massive RPG of epic story and length. Namco's now in charge of the <i>Xeno</i> series, and this is the first of many planned chapters.	9
Zone of the Enders: The 2nd Runner	Konami	Better enemies, better pacing, better music, better stages, and better weapons. What we're trying to say is, ZOE2 is better than the first.	8

[BUY!]

SILENT HILL 2

The first next-gen *Silent Hill* still innuendoes today with graphics that, while somewhat dated, still held up, and a twisted plot filled with the gory thrills we've come to know and love. Not as good as *Silent Hill 3*, but a good precursor nonetheless.



[AVOID!]

UNLIMITED SAGA

Don't give in, you can make it. Even though it's been a while since you've played a Square game, the beautiful disaster that is *Unlimited Saga* will only leave a fast taste in your mouth. Hold out for *Final Fantasy X-2* and *XI*. We believe in you.



PC TOP 50 A NEW NATION SHALL ARISE

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	OUR RATING
Aliens vs. Predator 2	Sierra	Three completely different first-person shooters combined into one dark and terrifying gaming experience.	9
Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn	Interplay	The rare occasion when the sequel to a classic goes above and beyond its predecessor. Can't wait for III.	9
Black & White	EA Games	Highly conceptual "god-game" that has you ruling over mortals with a little help from a giant cow-monster.	8
Battlefield 1942	EA Games	Multiplayer shooter set in WWII that lets you jump in and out of vehicles [even planes!] while battling dozens of your friends.	9
Civilization III	Infogrames	Big and bold, getting bigger and more complex while somehow managing to remain just as addictive.	10
Commandos 2	Edios	Control a squad of elite commandos in WWII as they infiltrate, detonate, and assassinate across multiple battlefields.	8
Day of Defeat	Activision	You won't need to upgrade your videocard to play this teamplay-focused WWII shooter. What a refreshing concept.	8
Dubio II: Lords of Destruction	Blizzard	The sequel to the ultimate dungeon-crawling clickfest should please anyone who wasted their teens playing the first game.	8
Dungeon Siege	Microsoft	Hack and slash doesn't have to be complicated. Sometimes, it can even be in beautiful 3D with no loading time between levels.	8
Enemy Engaged: Comanche v. Hokum	Empire Int.	Extremely realistic chopper sim that's not for the weak of heart or impatient of trigger finger.	9
EverQuest	Sony Online	The massively multiplayer RPG that's so addictive, it makes crack look like Sanka. Play this game at your own risk.	9
EverQuest: Scars of Velious	Sony Online	The expansion pack to EverCrack opens up new worlds, new characters, and tigers with boobies [finally!].	9
F1 2002	EA Sports	Delivers authentic yet accessible Formula One racing enjoyment for every open-wheel racing fan out there.	9
Fallout Tactics	Interplay	Squad-based tactical strategy game set in the same universe as the classic <i>Fallout</i> RPG that sets a new standard.	9
Freedom Force	EA Games	Clever use of strategy and RPG elements help make this witty comic book superhero-themed game one of the best.	10
Freelancer	Microsoft	It's not as simplistic as some might expect a PC space-shooter to be, but that's part of its charm. Random missions keep the fun going.	8
Ghost Recon: Island Thunder	Ubisoft	This top-notch mission pack makes a decent modern combat simulation into an outstanding one.	8
Ghosts of Cyren Kuluato	Interplay	A shooter/strategy hybrid full of weird British humor, unique and beautiful 3D graphics, and naked lady sex monsters.	9
Grand Prix 4	Infogrames	It's a tough choice for Formula One fans. GP4 and F1 2002 are both worthy of your hard-earned dollars.	9
Grand Theft Auto III	Rockstar Games	The poster child for all that's wrong in gaming is chock full of all that's fun in gaming. And you get to import your own MPGs.	10
Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Edios	An almost-perfect blend of action and stealth. It's a humongous improvement over the first game.	9
Il-2 Sturmovik	Ubisoft	Amazingly realistic WWII flight sim covering a region seldom visited in computer games: the Eastern Front.	9
Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast	LucasArts	Yeah, the lightsaber battles are sweet, but Lando's cameo just about seals the deal. And is his ship fly or what?	9
Kahn: Abraham's Gift	Strategy First	Surprisingly accessible fantasy-themed real-time strategy that's as much fun in single player as it is against other mages online.	9
Max Payne	G.O.D.	Despite some corky writing, this lberthip noir videogame feels like a movie, but plays like a great action game.	8
Mech of Honor: Allied Assault	EA Games	Worth it just for the incredibly intense D-Day mission that almost matches the same scene in <i>Saving Private Ryan</i> .	9
Medieval: Total War	Activision	The ultimate historical strategy game has everything from political intrigue to sweeping real-time battles.	9
Microsoft Flight Simulator 2002	Microsoft	The definitive civilian flight simulator. So authentic, actual airline pilots use it to keep their skills sharp.	9
The Elder Scrolls II: Morrowind	Bethesda	The definitive, open-ended RPG epic, sort of like GTA3, but with magic and elves and all that D&D flavor.	9
Mutator: Madness 2	Microsoft	It's mud-splattering, off-road supersport fun with this free-wheeling dirt bike simulator from the makers of <i>ATV Offroad Fury</i> .	9
Myth II: The Wolf Age	G.O.D.	Bungie's renowned magical real-time strategy title goes 3D and maintains its fantastic multiplayer reputation.	9
NASCAR Racing 2003	Vivendi Universal	It's the final installment of the series, and it's also the best. There's not much new, but everything's been tweaked to near-perfection.	8
Neverwinter Nights	Infogrames	If you're a D&D nerd, then you already know, but buy this one especially for the multiplayer and user-made mods.	9
No One Lives Forever	Vivendi Universal	Austin Powers ain't got nothing on Cate Archer, the hottest digital chick with a gun since that did-hag Lara Croft.	9
No One Lives Forever 2	Vivendi Universal	As funny and stylish as the original '60s spy spoof (if that's even possible) and more fun to play, too.	9
Operation Flashpoint: Cold War Crises	Codemasters	The first in the highly original series of combat sims, this soldier/flight/bank sim went on to win <i>CGW's</i> 2001 Game of the Year award.	9
Operation Flashpoint: Red Hammer	Codemasters	Letting you play as the bad guys is the sure way into our hearts. Especially when they're nasty Roskies.	9
Operation Flashpoint: Resurgence	Codemasters	Features and content worthy of a brand-new game, this is a benchmark expansion for a classic overlooked game.	9
Rainbow Six: Raven Shield	Ubisoft	The command interface and character A.I. have been revamped, but it runs slowly on anything but a high-end rig.	8
Rise of Nations	Microsoft	It's not the greatest RTS game we've played, but the nation-building aspect makes <i>Rise of Nations</i> especially appealing.	8
Sacrifice	Interplay	Action/strategy hybrid defies the conventions of all the genres it touches, while making for a fantastically original multiplayer experience.	8
Serious Sam	G.O.D.	Brainless running and gunning is an underappreciated way to waste a couple hours with a great-looking game.	8
Shadowbane	Ubisoft	Because of these silly things called laws, the only way we can attack and capture neighboring cities is through Shadowbane. Look out.	8
Sid Meier's Sim City Gold	EA Games	Sim Gold will have you laying out golf courses and building resorts like a virtual Robert Trent Jones.	8
The Sims	EA Games	It's impossible to categorize EA's addictive superbubblaster life simulator, just like it's impossible to stop playing it.	10
The Sims: Hot Date	EA Games	Gamers everywhere, rejoice! Finally, a game where you can actually learn a thing or two about interacting with the opposite sex!	10
The Sims Online	EA Games	If you were merely a Sims addict before, all the world is now lost. All the world's a stage, and your online Sim persona can play any part.	9
The Sims: Unleashed	EA Games	Not just a great addition to EA's behemoth franchise, an essential one. Everyone needs a dog, or maybe a monkey.	9
Unreal II: The Awakening	Infogrames	Somewhat of a letdown in terms of story and gameplay, but good nonetheless. Call us in five years when our gaming rigs can handle it.	8
Warcraft: Battleground	Ubisoft	RTS and RPG, two great flavors that go great together—especially when stirred together with a big gnarly wizard's staff!	8

[BUY]

THE SIMS: SUPERSTAR

► We've run out of room to include all of The Sims expansion packs (but we're up to now, 116!), but we'll give Superstar the nod if you want to take your virtual lifestyle even further. So, when we're going to see The Sims: Magazine Editor?



[AVOID]

RCT2: WACKY WORLDS

► It doesn't add much to the Roller Coaster Tycoon experience aside from turning your regular high-thrill coaster into a high-thrill coaster with an Igloo or Buddha statue in front of it. It might be nice to look at while standing in line, but great fun it is not.



XBOX TOP 50 TEAM NINJA'S SYSTEM OF CHOICE

TIME	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	OUR RATING
Apex	Atari	This racer is fantastic to look at and plays well enough to sit snugly between <i>Project Gotham Racing</i> and <i>Gran Turismo</i> on your shelf.	8
Badnar's Gate: Dark Alliance	Vivendi Universal	A beautiful-looking <i>Dungeons & Dragons</i> -based hack-and-slash that can be played cooperatively with another player.	8
Blad's Gate: Dark Alliance	Blad's	The Legacy of Kain story picks up where the original <i>Blood</i> ended. Blood Men left off, with you in control of the evil-yet-likeable vampire Kain.	8
Burnout	Acclaim	An arcade racer with an emphasis on spectacular crashes, which—now that we think about it—defeats the purpose of competitive racing.	8
Col Damage	Microsoft	Crazy cartoon car combat with great use of cel-shading and varied multiplayer options. It can quickly become repetitive, however.	8
Colin McRae Rally 3	Codemasters	Everybody's favorite rally racer. Colin McRae, has a brand-new game featuring finely tuned physics and car damage.	8
Crazy Taxi 3: High Roller	Sega	It's hard to improve upon the original, but that didn't stop Sega from trying. Twice. The setting is new, but it plays pretty much the same.	8
Dead or Alive 3	Techno	It's not the deepest of fighters, but it definitely competes for the best-looking prize. Plus, the girls are back in all their bouncy glory.	8
Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball	Techno	The definitive reason to own an Xbox. There are plenty of secondary reasons, sure, but no Xbox owner should be without <i>Halo</i> .	10
Fatal Frame	Techno	It's creepy. It's gory. It's the Techno game without the boobs. Another of those games better enjoyed with the lights off.	8
Halo	Microsoft	The definitive reason to own an Xbox. There are plenty of secondary reasons, sure, but no Xbox owner should be without <i>Halo</i> .	10
High Heat 2004	300	The best ball-game available this year. "Simulation" doesn't seem like a strong enough word to describe it.	9
James Bond 007: NightFire	EA Games	GoldenEye set an impossibly high standard for the Bond license, but <i>NightFire</i> does an admirable job of re-creating the feel of the films.	8
Jet Set Radio Future	Sega	Jet Set Radio Future has substance and an overabundance of style. Sega simplified tagging in favor of a more robust trick system.	8
Madden NFL 2002	Electronic Arts	It's a crowded genre on Xbox, with three different franchises competing for your attention. Madden is always a safe bet.	9
Max Payne	Rockstar Games	The "bullet time" effect is the big draw of this action/shooter. Inspired by Hong Kong action flicks, set against a gritty New York City.	8
MechAssault	Microsoft	It's a good single-player game, but it really shines on Xbox Live, where you're pitted against other mech pilots.	8
Medal of Honor: Frontline	EA Games	A strong single-player campaign paves the way across the beaches of Normandy and through the heart of France. Great audio.	8
Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance	Konami	Includes the original <i>MGS2: Sons of Liberty</i> , the brand-new missions featuring Solid Snake, and a slew of challenging VR missions.	9
Midnight Club II	Rockstar Games	Slightly better than Microsoft's <i>Midnight Madness</i> , although both are worthy additions to your library—especially if you have Xbox Live.	8
Midnight Madness 3	Microsoft	The single-player missions are nothing to write home about, but playing <i>MMD</i> online is a total blast.	9
MotorGP 2	THQ	What we said: "Can only be described as the best motorcycle-racing sim on the planet." What more do you need?	9
NASCAR Thunder 2003	EA Sports	Hate driving left for hours? NASCAR games probably aren't your thing. But if you "get it," <i>Thunder 2003</i> should be right up your alley.	9
NBA 2K3	Sega Sports	Yet another compelling reason to sign up for Xbox Live, <i>NBA2K3</i> is the best-playing game of hoops on the system.	9
NBA Live 2003	EA Sports	An improvement over previous versions, with a heavier focus on the faster-paced aspects of the game as opposed to a true simulation.	8
NBA Street Vol. 2	Electronic Arts	Even better than the first, <i>Vol. 2</i> takes you through the legendary players and teams of the NBA's storied history. A great deal of fun.	9
NCAA College Basketball 2K3	Sega	We're secretly hoping next year's version features an NCAA Rules Infraction mode. Think of the possibilities...	9
NFL 2K3	Sega	Sega's latest football effort compares nicely to the firmly entrenched Madden juggernaut, and even beats it in some areas.	9
NHL Hitz 20-02	Midway	<i>NHL Hitz</i> rhymes with <i>NFL Blitz</i> . That's no more coincidence. Hockey with no rules is just as fun as its lawless football counterpart.	9
Paradox Dragon Ona	Sega	Aesthetically beautiful and a dream to play. See what Saturn owners were enjoying seven years ago (the original <i>Paradox Dragon</i> is included).	9
Phantom Crash	Pharigram	Xbox certainly isn't lacking in mech titles. The quirky, unique <i>Phantom Crash</i> has upgradeable mechs and a story-driven 1P mode.	9
Project Gotham Racing	Microsoft	The refinement of the <i>Kudos</i> paint system is the biggest difference between <i>Project Gotham</i> and its Dreamcast predecessor.	8
Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Tales of War	Activision	This rally racer is one of the best examples of Xbox's power. More arcade than simulation, with enough depth to please both camps.	8
Robotech Battlecry	TDK Mediasave	The single-player missions still aren't much to write home about, but at least you can play them with a pal. The online play is great.	8
Rocky	Ubisoft	Cel-shaded graphics effectively capture the look and feel of the classic 1980s cartoon. Especially enjoyable for fans of the series.	8
Sega GT 2002	Sega	The best boxing game you can get for the Xbox. A technical knock-out, considering there's not much competition.	8
Shermoo II	Microsoft	Sega's answer to the <i>Gran Turismo</i> phenomenon. Not quite as expansive in terms of tracks and cars, but better with the details.	7
Silent Hill 2: Restless Dreams	Konami	The second chapter of Yu Suzuki's opus sees our hero Ryu traversing the streets of Hong Kong in search of his father's killer.	7
Star Wars Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast	LucasArts	A creepy part of a creepy game with a creepy bonus: a creepy extra episode of the creepy story. Play without lights for extra creepiness.	8
Steel Battalion	Capcom	As usual, the Star Wars universe inspires great aesthetic design to complement Raven Software's solid sense of game design.	8
Text Drive	Atari	If you want to play this game, you'll have to shell out \$200 for the massive controller. For those with the cash, it's worth it.	8
The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind	Bethesda	Race for pink slips on the underground circuit, and live out your Vin Diesel role-playing fantasy. Or just plain normal and race cars.	8
Timesplitters 2	Ends	An exhaustive open-ended RPG that essentially allows you to make it up as you go along with hundreds of people to talk to.	8
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon	Ubisoft	Everything good about the <i>IPSD</i> original is here, with loads of new multiplayer options including maps, weapons, and game modes.	8
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell	Ubisoft	There's not much of a graphical upgrade from the PC version, but the interface and audio are improved. Goes great with Xbox Live.	9
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3	Activision	Comparisons to <i>Metal Gear Solid</i> were inevitable. <i>Splinter Cell</i> holds its own, and even outdoes Konami's behemoth at times.	9
Unreal Championship	Atari	If you have to have <i>Tony Hawk 3</i> , improved graphics and framerate and the custom soundtrack option make this the best version to get.	8
Wakaboarder Unleashed	Activision	Mindless deconstructing with great weapon design and entertaining multiplayer modes, including the sport-like Bombing Run.	8
World Series Baseball 2K3	Sega Sports	A surprisingly stellar extreme-sports title that manages to make the <i>Tony Hawk</i> formula work on water. Watch out for the gators.	9
		<i>WSBK3</i> is the best-looking baseball game and it has a great Franchise mode, but it's got AI. Issues that still need to be worked out.	8

[BUY]

GHOSH RECON: ISLAND THUNDER

➔ We liked the original *Ghost Recon*, so it's only fitting that we live the new expansion disc *Island Thunder*, which, true to its nature, expands the experience of playing on Xbox Live. Plus it's only 30 bucks, so there's that.



[AVOID]

FURIOUS KARTING

➔ Once you get bored with *Furious Karting*'s targetable track design and odd karma system, you might find your self frustrated, irritable, agitated, or even testy. You should only experience the furious stage if you paid \$50 for it.



GAMECUBE TOP 50 ENTERING ITS PRIME

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	OUR RATING
All-Star Baseball 2004	Acclaim	The graphics keep getting better each year, but the gameplay isn't keeping pace. Nice presentation, but the batting interface needs work.	7
Animal Crossing	Nintendo	The game that never ends is based largely on routine chores, yard work, and interior decorating. So why is it so much fun to play?	9
Beach Spikers	Sega	Easy to pick up and easy to play, like Virtua Tennis. As with most arcade sports games, it's definitely better as a multiplayer affair.	7
Bermuda Generation	Majesco	A surviving member of the Old School, Bomberman has earned some tenure in the industry. This time, he sports a cel-shaded look.	8
Burnout 2: Point of Impact	Acclaim	The best-looking—and best-playing—racer on the system. Be prepared to spend many hours in Crash mode.	8
Cubivore	Atlus	A simple but compelling game of reproduction and cannibalism. Plus, you can get "hump points." You know you're interested.	7
Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2	Acclaim	Before turning to Larry Flynt for inspiration, XXX was based on the well-mannered Dave Mirra and actually focused on—get this—biking.	7
Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem	Nintendo	This game, if you let it, will mess with your head. The insanity effects are clever (the first time) and the scenery is downright creepy.	8
FIFA 2002	Electronic Arts	Though there's always room for improvement, EA's soccer series has been fairly decent. Plus, there's no real alternative yet.	7
Godzilla: Destroy All Monsters Melee	Atari	Godzilla & Co. wrecking cityscapes and each other, with support for up to four players. What's not to like?	7
Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets	EA Games	This Potter kid seems to be pretty popular, so the folks at EA decided to make a Zelda-esque adventure based on his magical exploits.	7
High Heat 2004	300	The best ball-game available this year. "Simulation" doesn't seem like a strong enough word to describe it.	9
The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	It looks and feels like the best Zelda game ever, but sailing back and forth in the overworld just feels like work.	9
Luigi's Mansion	Nintendo	We all wanted Mario at launch, and we got this. Like getting socks for Christmas, it's good and comfortable, but not what we wanted.	7
Madden NFL 2002	Electronic Arts	Those who bought the GameCube version instead of the PS2 edition were treated to roughly the same game. Good for them, though.	7
Mario Party 4	Nintendo	There are few things better in life than three friends, Mario Party, and a healthy flow of alcoholic beverages [if you're legal, of course].	8
Medal of Honor: Frontline	EA Games	A new story of D-Day and the ensuing action on the French front lines. The GameCube version has a multiplayer mode the others don't.	7
Metroid Prime	Nintendo	As if they dissected Super Metroid, added a dimension, and put it back together again with slick graphics. In fact, it's exactly like that.	10
HLB Slugfest 20-04	Midway	What Blitz is to football, Slugfest is to baseball. If you can't sit through nine innings of the regular game, this one's for you.	7
NASCAR Thunder 2003	EA Games	It's apparently the fastest growing "sport" in America, and Thunder 2003 is packed under the hood, including an in-depth career mode.	9
NBA 2K2	Sega	More of a sim than NBA Courtside, but it's the best basketball simulation available. Includes a great game of street ball, too.	9
NBA 2K3	Sega	Added to this year's version is a slick ESPN interface, an upgraded Franchise mode, and a fresh class of rookies.	9
NBA Courtside	Nintendo	No longer under the Nintendo development umbrella, Left Field's final installment of the Courtside series is a worthy B-ball game.	8
NBA Street Vol. 2	EA Sports	Even better than the first, Vol. 2 takes you through the legendary players and teams of the NBA's storied history. A great deal of fun.	9
NCAA College Basketball 2K3	Sega	We're secretly hoping next year's version features an NCAA Rules Infraction mode and thinks of the possibilities...	8
Pac-Man World 2	Namco	Purists will yell "HEREST!" at the new Pac-Man who can take multiple hits. People who actually enjoy good games will ignore them.	7
Phantasy Star Online Episode I & II	Sega	Unhealthily addictive. The pursuit of rare items helps one ignore the somewhat repetitive battle land the \$9 monthly fee.	7
Phantom	Nintendo	Mario creator Shigeru Miyamoto got the idea for this quirky strategy game from observing his personal garden. What kind of garden?	8
Resident Evil	Capcom	This remake could almost be described as a new game. But it is really Resident Evil without the laughably bad voice acting?	8
Resident Evil 2	Capcom	One this actually is a brand-new game, with significant changes such as droppable items and the dirty-sounding partner swapping.	9
Sega Soccer Slam	Sega	An arcade-style soccer game with off-the-wall characters, arenas, and power-ups. And it's still better than Virtua Striker!	8
Skies of Arcadia: Legend	Sega	If you missed it on Dreamcast—and many of you did—you've been given a second chance. It's even got new characters.	8
Smuggler's Run: Warzones	Rockstar Games	An enhanced version of Smuggler's Run 2, with new vehicles and maps and an expanded multiplayer mode with support for four players.	7
Some Adventure 2: Battle	Sega	Remember when you and your friends had daily Sonic vs. Mario debates? Don't you feel silly now? Or at least a little dolt?	7
Sonic Adventure DX	Sega	SA2 got an upgrade, while the original Adventure...uh, gets a bunch of old Game Gear games. Still a classic worth revisiting, though.	7
Sonic Mega Collection	Sega	Sure, the Sonic games were great, but \$40 may be too steep an asking price for a collection of old and unenhanced games.	7
Star Fox Adventures	Nintendo	Rare's last Nintendo effort took forever, but Star Fox Adventures takes its inspiration from The Legend of Zelda—and that ain't bad.	9
Star Wars: Rogue Squadron III: Rebel Leader	LucasArts	At times, Rogue Leader syncs closely with scenes from the movies. Impressive when you consider it took only nine months to make.	9
Star Wars: The Clone Wars	LucasArts	All the intense action of the movie, without melodramatic writing and weak acting. As with many GC games, multiplayer is a big draw.	7
Super Mario Sunshine	Nintendo	Maybe not quite as groundbreaking as Super Mario 64 was, but even when Nintendo "misses," it makes a big splash.	9
Super Monkey Ball	Sega	Monkeys in balls! An exceptional game based on a simple concept: some of the later levels will eat you for lunch.	7
Super Monkey Ball 2	Sega	Even more monkeys in balls running around for your entertainment! The extra game modes add quite a bit to the simple concept.	8
Super Smash Bros. Melee	Nintendo	A Nintendo fanatic's dream, if only for the exhaustive gallery of collectible Nintendoanabilia. Plus, you can beat the crap out of Jigglypuff.	9
TimeSplitters 2	Electronic Arts	Everything good about the original is here, with loads of new multiplayer options including maps, weapons, and game modes.	7
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3	Activision	For those with the Dual Shock hardwired into their psyche, switching over to the oddy shaped GameCube controller can prove difficult.	7
Ultimate Muscle	Bandai	If the soap-opera antics of the WWE don't go far enough over the top, perhaps the wacky Ultimate Muscle will be more to your liking.	7
Wario World	Nintendo	After all this time, Wario has become quite effective at reclaiming his stolen treasure. Too effective, as Wario World is over far too quickly.	7
Wave Race, Blue Storm	Nintendo	Great wave physics, awesome weather effects, and a deeper control scheme than the original. An underrated gem of a racer.	8
WWE Wrestlemania X8	THQ	Ratings have cooled and Stone Cold has had some run-ins with John Law, but that's irrelevant, as wrestling games will always sell.	8
X-Men: Next Dimension	Activision	If you absolutely must have an X-Men fighting game, this is your best bet. Better fighters exist, but they don't feature Wolverine.	7

[BUY]

ANIMAL CROSSING

→ If you buy Animal Crossing in September, you'll get it just in time to see the leaves change color. And to say all that wicked area rug from Patty the Hippo, who previously stifled you on that delivery job a while back. Yeah, this game is fun.



[AVOID]

TUBE SLIDER

→ Now that we've spent some quality time with F-Zero GX (look for the review next issue), Tube Slider looks even less exhilarating in comparison. If a sequel is done, we want better track design, and demitri, more speed.



GBA TOP 50 TWICE AS NICE

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	OUR RATING
Advance Wars	Nintendo	Turn-based military strategy that should be a part of everyone's GBA library. Once you get sucked in, it's hard to pull yourself away.	8
Advance Wars 2	Nintendo	Wars 2 only adds a single new unit, but it's chock full of new maps, new terrain, and new CD powers.	8
Baseball Advance	THQ	There are only four stadiums and no multiplayer, but it's still a great game of baseball.	6
Breath of Fire 2	Capcom	It's a part of the old SNES RPG, but we'd be willing to bet that quite a few of you missed it the first time. Don't repeat that mistake!	7
Car Battler Joe	Natsume	A fun and unique Car-PG that lets you build cars, add parts and weapons, and travel the world in search of your father.	9
Castlevania: Aria of Sorrow	Konami	Better sound and castle design than <i>Harmony of Dissonance</i> , but much too short. The soul system is ace, though.	8
Castlevania: Circle of the Moon	Konami	Castlevania is meant to be played in two dimensions, and this game shows why. A complex card system governs your special abilities.	9
Castlevania: Harmony of Dissonance	Konami	The second Castlevania is one of the best reasons to own a Game Boy Advance. The colors are brighter and the bosses are bigger.	9
Chu Chu Rocket!	Sega	A highly addictive and highly cute puzzle action game from Sega that's best played with multiple friends. Mouse mark!	9
F-Zero Maximum Velocity	Nintendo	A new F-Zero based on the classic SNES game, with improved graphics, new tracks, and four-player support.	8
Final Fight One	Capcom	Another enhanced port of an SNES original. How come majors of large cities don't go on ass-kicking rampages anymore?	6
Golden Sun	Nintendo	A deep combat engine and brilliant graphics make this one of the better RPGs available on GBA.	8
Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo	Picks up right where the first one left off. The battle system remains basically unchanged, but the puzzles are much more rewarding.	9
Gradus Galaxies	Konami	Konami's classic shooter series translates to the portable very well. Great graphics and plenty of challenge.	7
GT Advance 3	THQ	The GT Advance series has always been technically marvelous, and GT3 (yeah, we know) finally has a battery-save function!	6
Outlaw Star	Sammy	Not surprisingly, the animation and soundtrack take a hit, but it still plays like its big brother versions.	7
Iridion II	Majesco	The first Iridion served as a neat technical demo, but its sequel concentrates more on having good gameplay. Another quality shooter.	8
Kirby: Nightmare in Dreamland	Nintendo	A remake of the NES classic Kirby's Adventure with updated graphics and multiplayer support.	9
Klonoa: Empire of Dreams	Namco	Straying from the original formula, this Klonoa is one of a puzzle game that works on a platformer, with great graphics and sound.	8
Konami Krazy Racers	Konami	A Mario Kart-esque mascot car race filled with classic Konami characters like Dracula, Goemon, and MG's Ninja.	7
Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past	Nintendo	Invite three friends and you've got a bona fide Zelda party. Drink red medicine till you puke and skinny dip in Lake Hyli!	9
Lufia: The Ruins of Lore	Allus	Perennially overshadowed by Square's offerings, the Lufia series is just as engaging as Final Fantasy. It's also more challenging.	8
Lunar Legend	Ubi Soft	The anime cut-scenes and superb voice acting may be gone, but the great Lunar gameplay and story remain intact.	8
Mario Kart: Super Circuit	Nintendo	A balanced blend of Super Mario Kart and Mario Kart 64 that even includes all the tracks from the former.	9
Mega Man and Bass	Capcom	It's hard, so very hard. But what Mega Man game isn't? Play as either Mega Man or Wily robot Boss; each one has different abilities.	9
Mega Man Battle Network 2	Capcom	More of an RPG than an platformer, the Battle Network series is a nice change of pace for Mega Man and pals.	7
Mega Man Battle Network 3	Capcom	Battle Network 3 is pretty much more of the same with a few minor additions, but it's already a great series.	7
Mega Man Zero	Capcom	A difficult yet engaging installment of the X side story played as Zero, who is equipped with an arm cannon and beam saber.	7
Metroid Fusion	Nintendo	The follow-up to Super Metroid is eight years late, but the wait was well worth it. An adventure that ends way too quickly.	9
Ninja Fire-0	Konami	A challenging platformer that brings back fond memories of Bionic Commando. Complete with throwing stars and katanas.	7
Phantasy Star Collection	THQ	Straightforward classic RPG action that's been overlooked for far too long. Includes Phantasy Star 1, 2, and 3.	9
Pokémon Ruby & Sapphire	Nintendo	Aside from 2-on-2 battles, the first GBA Pokémon combo doesn't really change the original formula.	7
Rayman Advance	Ubi Soft	Rayman is just as good in 2D as he is in 3D. It looks great and provides a decent challenge.	8
Sonic Advance 2	THQ	Sonic Advance 2 is much improved over the first one, and it connects to the GameCube's Sonic Adventure games to boot.	8
Sonic Pinball Party	Sega	Not limited to just hedgehogs, Sega's solid pinballer features tables from the classics Nights and Samba de Amigo.	8
Street Fighter Alpha 3	Capcom	Sure, the limiting button configuration prevents SF3A from being a completely accurate port, but it's great nonetheless.	9
Super Dodgeball Advance	Allus	You're not going to find that many dodgeball games on the market, so thankfully this one is worthwhile. Better in multiplayer.	8
Super Ghouls & Ghosts	Capcom	Remember how frustrated you got playing through Ghouls & Ghosts? Get ready to do it all over again.	8
Super Mario Advance: Super Mario 2	Nintendo	Aside from the odd naming system, you can't really complain about a portable version of Super Mario Bros. 2.	8
Super Mario Advance 2: Mario World	Nintendo	There's really not much else that can be said except "portable Super Mario World" and "you should buy it."	9
Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	Yoshi is the star of this show, one of the greatest 2D platformers ever put to silicon. There are even a couple of new bonus levels.	9
Super Monkey Ball Jr.	THQ	An excellent port of the game that sold many a Gamecube. THQ even included Monkey Bowling and Monkey Fight!	8
Super Puzzle Fighter II	Capcom	Sometimes, you just get bored with Tetris. Puzzle Fighter II is a fantastic port of a fantastic and highly addictive game. Buy it now.	8
Super Street Fighter II	Capcom	The combo of SF3A, Outlaw Star X-Advance, and Super Street Fighter 2 is devastating. And you don't even need any quarters!	8
Tactics Ogre: The Knights of Lodis	Allus	An incredibly deep strategy RPG with a branching story line and a rewarding battle system.	7
The Lost Vikings	Buzzard	Buzzard's classic puzzler finds new life, but without any of the extras or enhancements one might expect.	7
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3	Activision	It's amazing how Activision managed to cram Tony Hawk into a cartridge while keeping the essence of the console version intact.	8
Virtual Tennis	THQ	A surprisingly faithful rendition of the console version with good visuals and an engaging World Tour mode. The best tennis on GBA.	8
Wario Land 4	Nintendo	The Wario series of platformers has always been excellent, and this one is no exception. Short but incredibly sweet.	8
Wario Ware, Inc.	Nintendo	A large collection of microgames fuels Wario Ware's madcap mayhem. The freshest game we've seen in a long time.	9

[BUY!]

CAR BATTLER JOE

➡ If we had to guess, we'd say that approximately seven of you guys and girls have ever heard of Car Battler Joe, the Car-PG (ah! that clever!) that has you building custom cars and weapons in search of your long-lost father. Find it before it's gone forever.



[AUDIO!]

CONTRA ADVANCE EX

➡ A part of the SNES classic Contra 3, The Alien Wars might be tempting, but we urge you to resist. Konami has taken out the weapon switching and power bombs for no discernable reason, other than to make it super-extra-difficult.



HE'S OLD! HE'S PISSED!

GAME GEEZER

POOR DESIGN. DUMB CHARACTERS. AND NO CONTRAOL: THE BLAME GAME SUCKS.

➔ "Hey, Game Geezer, we have a ques— Whoa, who's that doofus on your TV? Is that Forrest Bump?"

No, it's not Forrest Gump, you dimwits. It's Elvis Presley. He was a famous rock 'n' roll singer back in the 1950s.

"No way. What's up with his hips and stuff? Dude looks like he has epilepsy."

Yeah, that's what lots of adults said at the time, too. When he played music on one TV show, they would show him only from above the waist.

"Say what?"

You heard me. They thought it was immoral and indecent to show his gyrating hips. They thought kids would become depraved just by watching him.

"That's like the dumbest thing we've ever heard."

Yep. Almost as dumb as when the U.S. Senate decided to waste taxpayers' money back in 1954 by holding hearings to decide whether comic books led to juvenile delinquency.

"Huh?"

That's right. The lead witness, one Dr. Frederick Wertham, wrote an entire book about the evils of comics, called *Seduction of the Innocent* and testified that comics created "an atmosphere of deceit and

cruelty." Kind of like the Senate. "Uh, Mr. Geezer? You're kind of boring us this month. We like it better when you make jokes and stuff."

You want a joke? OK, here: Your mama's so fat, she puts lipstick on with a paint roller. Happy now? Now, pay attention and try learning something for a change. The point is, this whole country has been acting like a dang 4-year-old, looking around for somebody or something to blame anytime anything goes wrong, rather than taking on some personal responsibility.

Fifty years ago, it was rock music and comic books. Today, it's videogames. Every time some socially maladjusted kid commits a crime now, you can count the seconds until the newscaster mentions that the kid played videogames. As if every other kid in America—most of whom are completely well-adjusted human beings—didn't also play videogames.

The problem isn't games. It isn't any form of pop culture. It's stupid people breeding. The way I figure it, most people shouldn't even have a license to drive, let alone a license to have kids. But no, they keep breeding. So what you have now is entire families,

and in some cases, states, full of stupid people who go around blaming things they don't understand when something goes wrong. Nope, it couldn't be our lousy parenting or the underfinanced, crappy school system. It must be those darn videogames!

Right now, there are a bunch of politicians and groups around the country scheming to restrict or outlaw the sale of videogames to minors. The thinking being, I guess, that if a kid can't buy a copy of *GTA3*, the world will be a little safer. I have a better idea. Instead of checking kids' IDs when they buy games, how about we start checking parents' IDs instead? "Sorry, son, I know you want *GTA*, but your dad is pretty much a total dumbass, so we're gonna have to say no." But who am I kidding? Nothing's gonna change.

Not ever. Not until we find something new to blame. **✶**



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